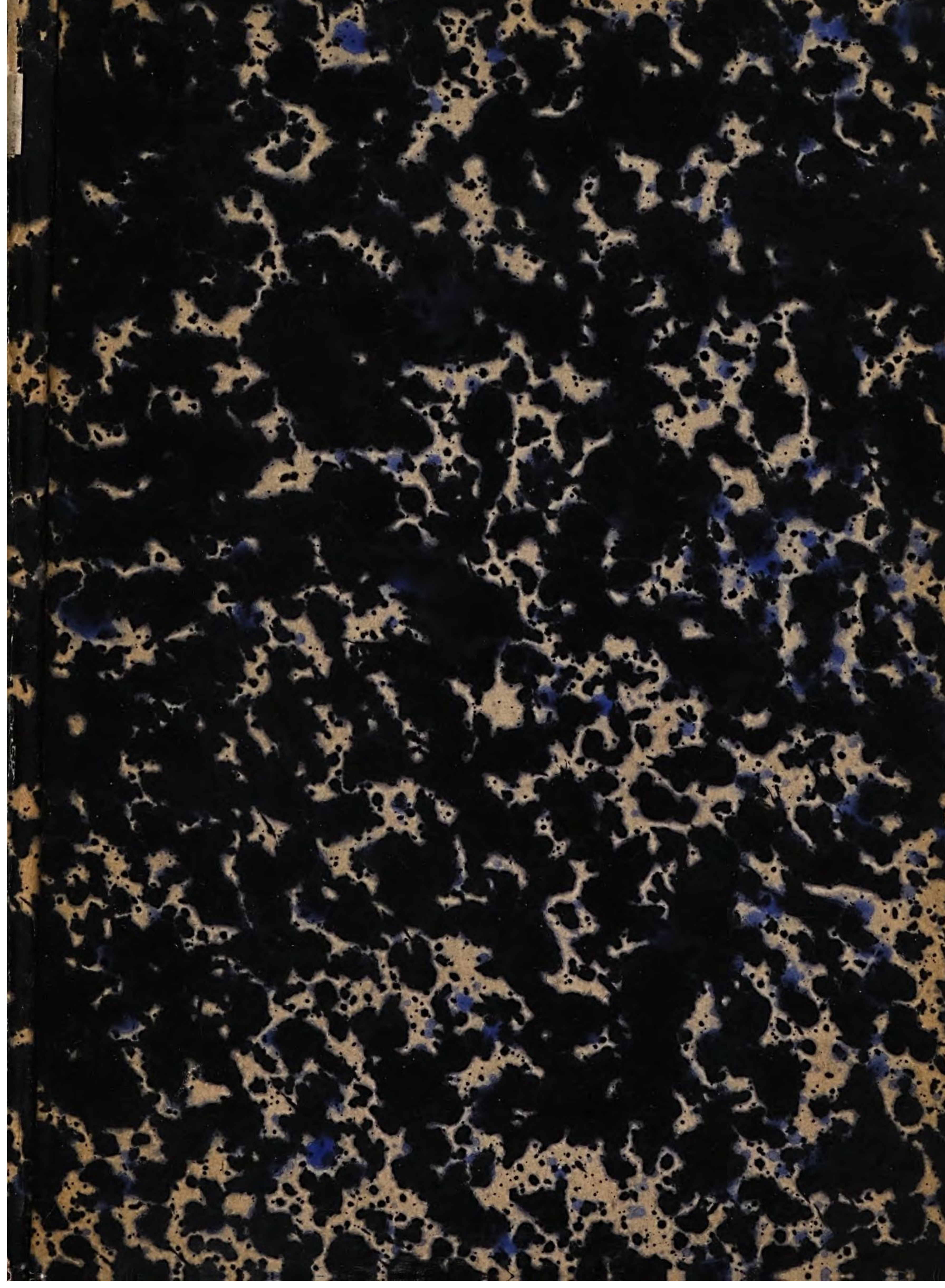




L. angl.
o 79
1

COMIN' THRO' THE RYE.

BY

HELEN B. MATHERS.

"Had we never met sae kindly,
Had we never loved sae blindly,
Never met and never parted,
We had ne'er been broken-hearted."

COPYRIGHT EDITION.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

HAMBURG.
KARL GRÄDENER.

1878.

The Right of Translation is reserved.

COMING THRO' THE RYE

HELEN B. MATHERS



VOL. I

HAMBURG

KARL GRADNER

1878

SEED TIME.

SEED TIME.

COMIN' THRO' THE RYE.

CHAPTER I.

»It is the admirer of himself and not the admirer of virtue that thinks himself superior to others.«

» 'Poor Martha Snell, her's gone away;

Her would if her could, but her couldn't stay;

Her'd two sore legs and a baddish cough,

But her legs it was as carried her off!'

That's *mine*. Have you got anything to-day, Alice? «

»Nothing,« says our lovely sister, lifting her head from »Paley's Evidences,« »but Nell has.«

»Bring it out, then!« says Jack, rapping the table smartly with his ruler.

Happy Jack! who is deterred from amusing himself by no such considerations concerning Scripture exercises and the like as lie heavy upon the rest of us; he is home for the holidays, and as his soul is supposed to be well weeded and watered by his pastors and masters while he is away, it is left in peace while he is at home.

»It is a little vulgar,« I admit, looking round,
»but then you know you all like vulgar jokes.
Not that this is a joke, — far from it, it is a veritable, properly authenticated family——«

»Business is business,« says Jack, interrupting;
»give us the epitaph first, and your remarks after.«

»Here lies the body of Betsy Binn,
Who was so very pure within,
She bust this outer shell of sin,
And hatched herself a cherubim!«

»There! *burst*, not bust,« says Jack, reprovingly;
»don't expose your ignorance, Nell.«

»It is not,« I say stoutly; »burst is quite a leisurely way of doing things. *Bust* gives you the idea of cracking all over like a chrysalis and flying straight up through the air, as Betsy did.«

»I don't think it's as good as Thomas Wooden,« says Alice, gravely. »His widow showed so much sense in adapting herself to circumstances.«

»Or that other one,« says Milly, looking up—

»Poor Martha Kitchen! her days were spent,
She kicked up her heels and away she went.«

»I like the baby's best,« says Jack; »that one on an infant three months old, you know—

»Since I am so quickly done for,
I wonder what I was begun for?«

»Nurse told me of one yesterday,« says Milly, resting her elbows on a Pinnock, »that she *saw* with her very own eyes—

»Here lies the unworthy son of a worthy father.' The stone was erected by the father.«

»That is nasty,« says Alice; »the others only show extraordinary levity. I wonder what the people were like who made them up?«

»Shaky as to their grammar,« says Jack, »and sadly in want of a dictionary!«

»Would you like a grammatical one,« I ask, »and a *properly spelt* one? I don't say it's a particularly *good* one.«

»Good heavens!« says Jack, leaning forward. »Nell is,—yes—no—*yes*, she is positively blushing!«

»I am not!« I say, looking at them all steadily. »No one ever accused me of such a thing before!«

»Then, to what,« asks Alice, laughing, »may we ascribe this sudden access of colour? Heat, modesty, shame, or pride at having made a rhyme? for I do believe you have.«

»Heat!« I say shortly; »how we shall broil in church!«

»Now then,« says Jack, »we must not permit the first literary effort of the family to die for want of air, let's have it.«

»It is not much of it,« I say, apologetically,
»but our riddles and epitaphs were running so low,
that I thought it was high time some new ones
were invented, and anything is better than nothing,
you know! Here it is—

«Here lies the body of
Helen Adair,
Cruelly slain, in the Flower of her
Youth and Beauty, by
Amberley's Nags.

P.S.—Amberley's Nags were the only horses visible at
her funeral, for she died a Pauper.'«

»Ha! ha! ha!« goes Jack. «'Youth and beauty',
first-rate that.»

»And Amberley does nag at Nell shamefully,«
says Alice.

»And you all say,« I put in, standing up for
my bantling, »that my extravagant tastes will bring
me to want some day, do you not? Only I don't
see how I can ever be very lavish on nothing.»

»The governor tells us every day that we shall
come to the—union,« says Milly. »I wonder if it
is very bad?«

»They separate the sexes,« I say, looking fond-
ly at Jack who is whittling away at a pencil in
utter ignorance of my affectionate glance, »and I
should never like *that*.«

»What's the matter with Amberley?« he asks, looking up. »Has she got spasms?«

»Bilious,« I say, nodding. »*She* calls it sick headache, but I know better. She won't be able to get up till to-morrow, therefore can't harass our already too highly cultivated brains with Paley and Pinnock. I wonder why Sunday is called a day of rest? It is not to *us*.«

»I wish the holidays would come,« says Milly, sighing. »Why should we have them in July instead of June? It can't make any difference.«

»Amberley is not going away for her holidays,« says Alice; »her brother, who is sixty, has got the measles. Did I tell you about her boots yesterday?«

»No; what was it?«

»You know we walked into Silverbridge? Well, she went into Summer's to buy a pair of boots, and she managed to squeeze her feet into a pair much too small for her, then said to the old man who was standing by with his mouth screwed up on one side, 'I think these will do, though they may hurt me a little at first.' 'Lor, miss,' said old Summers, '*that* don't siggerfy, that ain't of no account, but *I knows they'll bust!*'«

»And after that delicate warning did she take them?« asks Jack.

»She did!«

»Let us hope then,« says Milly, »that she will not wear them in one of our breathless scampers behind the governor, or she will come back without them!«

»I have done my exercise,« says Dolly, speaking for the first time, »and so has Alan.«

»Of course you have,« says Jack; »did either of you ever do anything without the other? You eat, drink, weep, wipe up the blots from your copy-books with your noses, and, I believe, *snore* simultaneously!«

»I wonder how soon the bells will strike up,« I say, walking to the window and looking out into the broad, peaceful fairness of the Sabbath morning. There is no sound of work or voices abroad, the court is very still save for the voice of a thrush in the yew tree yonder, who sings as gaily and loudly as though it were not Sunday at all, but common, homely week-day. The shrill bark of the grasshoppers sounds quite plainly from the lawn, the flowers are ruffled gently by the soft light wind; they have not changed their lovely garments or put on a different colour because it is Sunday, happier in this than we mortals who make it a point of honour to smarten ourselves

up for the Lord's day, and yet never emulate those dainty blossoms in their delicate, heaven-dyed tints. The cocks and hens pace gravely by, dirty and disreputable as on any other day, and I look at them with attention, wondering whether either of them has laid an egg, a practice in very great disfavour among the tribe, and am inclined to think, from the sidelong strut and complacency of a youthful matron of the Brahma species, that she has done her duty in that state of life to which it has pleased Providence to call her.

»I shall kill that pair of black Hamburgs to-morrow,« says Jack, nodding towards two straggling wretches (Why are *all* his fowls so lean?), who are scratching in blessed unconsciousness of the Nemesis of impecuniosity that walks behind them. »I want three shillings, and I don't know any other way of getting it.«

»Mamma won't buy any more of you,« I say with conviction, »the last were so stringy and thin, that she said she dared not; the governor would call on the poultry woman, and it would all come out.«

»If he only knew,« says Milly, »that after feeding their bodies in life he had to pay for their carcasses in death, how comforting it would be to

his feelings! and every morning, *regularly*, he says their heads shall be cut off before night.«

»And they deserve it,« says Jack with unusual viciousness, »for of all the ill-behaved brutes I ever came across, they are the worst. They never lay eggs, or grow fat, or do any of the things all other well-regulated fowls are supposed to do.«

»Mr. and Mrs. Skipworth are coming to dinner,« says Alice, »to their quarterly festival, you know, and, thank goodness, we shall not be expected *to talk*. I wonder,« she adds with the gay laugh that never degenerates into a bellow like Jack's, or a cackle like mine, »whether she will wear her purple satin gown?«

»I hope so,« says Jack, unkindly; »for sooner or later I am certain that she will blow up in it, as Betsy Binn did, and sit calm and smiling in the midst of the purple ruins. Why should not the event take place to-day, indeed?«

Ding-dong! ding-dong! goes a squeaky little bell hard by; it is the voice of Silverbridge church, summoning its flock to worship. We are so near the churchyard, that from our windows we can throw a pebble at the railings that close in the vault of our ancestors, by whose side we must all lie some day (if there is room), every one. There

are so many of us though, that some will have to lie in state and some simply, as poor folks do; those who go first will have the best place, those who go last the lower one. We do not pause to put away our books, but set off down the long passage and up the stairs and down more steps and up others, for the Manor House is built with the especial purpose of breaking the necks, legs, and arms of the inhabitants thereof, and though we from long acquaintance escape scot free, so do not stranger servants, who usually pitch head foremost down one or other of the many pitfalls, and come heavily to grief. Our bed-rooms are low and wide, opening one out of the other inconveniently enough, and they have latticed casements, through which the queen of flowers herself nods gaily in, reflecting herself in myriad shapes of crimson, yellow, white, and pink. Out of her beautiful breast drop those ugly parasites the earwigs, and make themselves very much at home among our hair-brushes, and the simple appointments of our dressing tables. As yet these latter are primitive enough, they hold a glass of flowers, a pin-cushion, a few trinket-cases, a ribbon or two, and that is all. We have no powder, or cosmetics, or appliances for painting the lily, but look in our

glasses and see our faces, pretty or ugly, just as God made them. Alice's mirror gives back a dainty picture enough as she stands before it, tying the brown strings of her quakerish brown bonnet that is just the colour of the soft love-locks that lie rich and smooth beneath. I wish that you could see her as she is at this moment, with the freshness of a wild rose in her exquisite cheeks, with the bloom of perfect health in her blue eyes, with the lovely severity of a sculptured Venus in the low white brow, and curved lips, and perfectly modelled cleft chin, and slender neck. We are very proud of our sixteen-year-old sister, our eldest and our only beauty; we are not a bad-looking family, people say, but none of us come within a mile of Alice. Milly is handsome, after a sturdy, square, determined fashion, with a fine pair of dark blue eyes, black lashed, and a shock of lightish hair that sets straight out from her head in every direction. Now, if there is one thing for which we owe gratitude to the governor, it is for providing the family with such real, good, blue eyes. Reckoning his own and mother's we number just twelve pairs among us; and by blue I do not mean that mixture of slate and grey, or green, so commonly misnamed blue, but a colour as pure and vivid as the tint

of a flower, from the clear saucy blue of the forget-me-not to the deep purple that lurks in the heart of the violet. We are eleven boys and girls altogether, and I have said that we number twelve pairs of eyes of one colour, so it is plain there must be one exception to the general rule, and that is *me*. My eyes were green from the day of my birth, and will be green to the hour of my death; mamma calls them grey, but where one's personal appearance is concerned it is always safer to believe one's enemies than one's friends.

»The governor is brushing his hat!« exclaims Jack, bursting in upon us spick and span in his correctly fitting gloves and boxer, and we follow him precipitately. In the hall are assembled mamma, Dolly, Alan, and such of the young ones as are old enough to go to church, and the governor. He has finished brushing his hat, and put it on his head, but as he is rummaging in a drawer for his gloves he does not notice our late arrival. And now he sets out, mamma by his side, the procession is formed, and we all tail two and two behind them. Across the lawn, through the wicket-gate, in at God's Acre, past our ancestors Geoffry and Joan, who lie in duplicate marble effigy above ground, bleached bones below, flat on their backs,

with their toes turned stiffly up, and their prim hands folded palm to palm. If the effigies are good likenesses, I should say that Geoffry must have been an obstinate, uncomfortable sort of old fellow, while Joan was pleasant to live with and very much under her lord's thumb. An impertinent rose-bush planted by Geoffry's side is holding its sweet red blossom to his marble nose, and from it he seems to be turning away disdainfully, just as, maybe, he did in life from all fair and pleasant things. Under the porch, along the cool dark aisle we go, and file into the long pew that seems expressly made for a man with many children. Mamma sits at the top, papa at the bottom; and the great object of our Sunday morning existences is to get as far away from *him* and as near to her as we possibly can, hence various silent and rapid manœuvres behind his back that is as well for us that he does not suspect. To-day I am the hapless left-behind, and take my seat with a wrathful heart and a sickly smile that seeks to convey to my brethren the fact, that I do not mind my situation at all, indeed rather like it than otherwise; there is, however, a covert grin on the row of triumphant faces to my right, that plainly informs me my little hypocrisies will not go down in *that* quarter. We

all look upon the governor as a kind of bombshell, or volcano, or loaded gun, that may blow up at any moment and will infallibly destroy whatever is nearest to him, therefore our fears are usually lively when ill-luck plants us very close to him.

As usual we are early, so we sit and watch the old village people come in, prayer-book in hand, with the clean handkerchief folded on the top, and a rose or sprig of wallflower laid between, at which they will sniff between whiles, when they are not listening to an exposition of their sins, or looking to see if the quality has any new clothes on. The village hind comes in rosy faced and well greased, he has taken his weekly wash, put on his weekly clean boiled rag, and with the bit of roast beef and pudding provided for his dinner lurking in his memory and tickling his nostrils, feels not unamiably disposed towards the wife of his bosom, and has no inclination to beat her as is his wont on week-days when he has a little spare time. In the gallery opposite sit the Sunday-school girls and ploughboys, an unruly tribe, impervious to the verbal remonstrances of Prodgers the schoolmaster, of which fact he is well aware, and possesses a more substantial claim to their regard in the shape of a stout cane, with which he discourses sweet

music on their rustic backs, coming down with an inspiriting whack! in a pause of the sermon or interval of prayer.

Last Sunday he made a *faux pas*, for, being at the back of the gallery, and spying the unmannerly conduct of an obstreperous purple-cheeked lass in the first row, he leant forward to take summary vengeance on the same, but alas! she was »so near, and yet so far«, and in striving to reach her he overbalanced himself, and fell upon a cluster of maidens of tender years, who howled dismally, while the cane succeeded in doing no more than poking the crown of the offender's bonnet in! We did not smile, and papa could detect no unseemly mirth on our faces when he glanced sharply up and down our pew, for we have by long practice acquired the art of laughing inwardly, and can be in ecstasies of amusement without moving a muscle of our countenances.

At last Mr. Skipworth is in his place, and the service begins. The governor makes his amens as fervently and loudly as the clerk, and we all follow, down to the very smallest child; in fact, such a wave of hearty sound runs along our ranks as might almost suffice to blow a thin man off his legs, if placed directly before us. And now we

have all settled our backs against the hard pew, we have planted our feet firmly on our respective stools, and we have opened our hearts and ears widely for such spiritual comfort as Mr. Skipworth may think fit to administer. Papa turns himself about and, resting his elbow on the edge of the pew, has us all safely under his eye. The sermon begins, and though we fix our attention upon our pastor unwinkingly, we cannot follow his meaning, or indeed discover that he has any; his words beat upon our ears with a sense of wearying, empty babble. Is not a man supposed to select a text for the purpose of expounding it? But Mr. Skipworth does nothing of the sort. He walks up to it, it is true, and looks at us over the other side, he ambles round it, makes dashes at it, repeats it over and over again, but never really *grasps* its meaning and brings it home to us. In his ramblings he mentions Methuselah, and the name catching my wandering thoughts I fall to speculating about that old world-weary man, who must have been so tired of his life before God permitted him to lay it down. Surely his latter days were ghastly, grey, and lonely, with all his people and the friends of his youth lying in their graves and no new ones to fill their places? At what period of his life,

I wonder, may he have been considered to be growing a trifle elderly, and did his father whip him after he was a hundred years old? What must his tailor's bills have come to, and how many Mrs. Methuselahs and little Methuselahs may there have been? Papa is not much past forty, and he has eleven children; if he lived until he were nine hundred and sixty-nine years old, how many might he be *reasonably* supposed to have? That is a sum, and more than my head, unaided by slate or pencil, is good for. I have not half exhausted the subject when Mr. Skipworth blesses and dismisses us, and we are out again, pacing along the narrow path that divides these soft swelling green mounds that we call *graves*.

How I pity you, poor, patient, forgotten, dead folk! I know that you are not here, that your spirits are transplanted to greater bliss or greater misery than the world ever gave you, but with my human heart I think of your bodies laid away in the earth's breast, not of your deathless freed souls. They have buried you away so deep, that not a glimmer of God's sunshine can pierce through to your dark, narrow beds. You are hidden away so close, that the gurgling song of the thrush, or the shrill call of the blackbird, can never reach or

thrill you; though your best beloved were passing by, you could not stir one hair's breadth from your bondage; though you are cradled in the very heart of the earth, you cannot feel her throbbing pulses, smell her fresh flowers; her joy, her riches, and her sweetness are not for you—not for you! I am sorry for you, oh dead! just as some day some one will, perchance, be sorry for me, and looking down at the grass that grows over me, heave a sigh and say, Poor soul! and turn back as I am doing to the breath of God's air, the caress of His south wind, and the thousand thousand treasures that He has so bountifully poured into the hands of the living.

We pass into the garden, cool with the shadow of the dark-leaved beeches, a rambling queer old place, with many odd twists and corners infinitely dear to our hearts, for by their aid do we contrive to dodge the governor with surprising success. Away to the left is the kitchen garden, ample, well-stocked, closely guarded, before which we are wont to sit down with watering mouths, and hearts as sighing as ever was that of Petrarch after Laura. This, our paradise, is enclosed by an envious and abhorred wall, too high to climb, too dangerous to jump, over which we have all in turn jeopardized

our necks and legs, and come to cruel grief, as many a bruised shin and dismal lump attest, while the potato bed, which we always select to fall upon, under a mistaken impression that it is softer than gooseberry bushes, could tell many a tale of shame and disaster. At the present moment, however, we are indulging in no such monkey tricks, we are walking two and two behind the governor, dutifully listening to his fulminations against Dorley, who has permitted two sticks and a stone to disgrace the velvet smoothness of the lawn. Dorley has been discharged without a character, departed from here to the union, from the union to gaol, and from gaol to the gallows, before we reach the house.

»There will be some fun at dinner to-day,« says Alice as we go upstairs, »for Mrs. Skipworth had on her purple gown in church!«

CHAPTER II.

»There is no slander in an allowed fool though he do nothing but rail, nor no railing in a discreet man though he do nothing but reprove.«

WE may not be a very uncommon family, I do not say we are; and we may be a very handsome family (with one or two exceptions), I do not say we are not; but I defy our worst enemy to accuse us of being a *sociable* family. We care for nobody, no, not we, and nobody cares for us! If we ever had any friends, which I strongly doubt, they have betaken themselves to foreign parts, or melted like snow, or died of a »waste« or—something; and as we have no relations—uncles, aunts, or cousins—we never see a soul. The truth is, papa quarrels with every man and woman he knows, on principle, and has come to the very end of his acquaintance, being (I think) heartily sorry that there is no one left that he can get a chance of being rude to.

Once a year, or so, some determinately peaceful neighbour, who is fond of mother, and wishes to

know how she fares, drives through our hospitable gates, and in fear and trembling pulls the creaking body of our front-door bell, rusty with disuse as was ever that one belonging to poor, down-trodden, cowardly Mariana, who, in my opinion, was never worthy of the honour of being sung in verse. The sound of that bell when it *does* ring strikes as much consternation to our souls as the last trump might; from far and near we gather to see the fun, doors open, heads are popped round corners, the footman rushes hither and thither, seeking to ascertain the whereabouts of »master«, lest unhappily he usher the daring intruder into that awful presence, and thereby secure his own instant dismissal. In the distance is seen papa, furiously dashing his hat upon his head, and rushing out of the house by some back door, while the air is pleasingly filled with his shouts of welcome. (It is needless to say that he hates callers even worse than his friends, and with an intensity that you will find nowhere, save in the breast of a well-born, well-educated English gentleman, whose house and family are all that could be wished, and who has nothing in the world to be ashamed of.) Meanwhile the cause of the commotion cools her heels upon the door-step, and is at last admitted,

much as though she were something dangerous, or had come from a fever hospital, or was suspected of having intentions on the spoons.

Once in every three months the Skipworths are invited to dinner, and there our entertainments end, for no other strangers eat of our salt from January to December. How it is papa has not succeeded in quarrelling with the reverend gentleman, I cannot imagine, for goodness knows he has tried hard enough. Mr. Skipworth, however, is one of those dear affectionate souls who find it absolutely impossible to quarrel with any one who has it in his power to bestow certain substantial gifts; and when the governor slaps him on the one cheek, he is Christian enough to offer to him the other, and what is more, look as if he liked it. He is talking to mother now; a stout, sleek, pear-shaped man, whose legs always seem to me to have been swallowed up by his body, as the lesser rods were by Aaron's. He has a smile that would butter the whole neighbourhood; a smile that Jack and I *hate*, and would wipe off his face with a duster if we could. Papa is talking to Mrs. Skipworth. How the broad June sun is flooding her purple gown and purpler face! How hot and kind and uneasy she looks, for her dress is stretched across her

tight as a drum! Poor soul, she squints; not harmlessly, wonderingly, inoffensively, but *diabolically*; while one eye appears to be surveying the person she addresses, the other is firmly fixed on some one the other side of the room. Jack and I have worn ourselves out in speculations as to whether she can see with both eyes at once, or only one, whether she is literally able to keep her eye on two people at once, or whether she *makes up her mind* which eye she means to look out of, and drops that one and takes up the other at a moment's notice; in short, shifts the seeing power at will; whether—but our marvellings are not worth the writing down. Plain as she is, there is yet something very unique and interesting about her,—she has no children! And as she is probably the only parson's wife on record who has not half a dozen, she deserves to be chronicled as an amazing and historical fact. Greatness has its drawbacks, however, and she is not satisfied with her childless home, her husband does not like it either, and I have seen him glance at our overflowing numbers with a scarcely concealed bitter envy that sends a pang, I am sure, to the womanly heart beating so warmly under the gorgeous satin yonder, that would never be on her back if little feet were

gathered about her, little voices clamouring for milk and bread and butter. And now we are walking in to dinner, and Jack, taking an unfair advantage of my proximity to him, trips me up in such wise, that I take a header into my pastor's ample back, and am only saved from ignominious disgrace by the fact that the governor is too far ahead to notice the slight scuffle.

I wonder why people always feel so much more hungry on Sundays than any other day? Is it the sermon, or is it because we have kept our mouths shut so long, that we have not taken in enough air? Anyway, we settle to our dinner in earnest, and there is a long satisfied silence. I come to the surface first, and glance around me, thinking how very like animals we all look, though we do use knives and forks and dinner-napkins.

Mrs. Skipworth looks uneasy; her dress certainly is *tighter* than it was in the drawing-room. Surely there will be an explosion soon. There is! She lays down her knife and fork, gives a mighty sneeze—a loud crack, as of hooks and eyes being violently divorced, is heard, then she settles herself in her chair and looks relieved. It is very strange, but there is no gaping fissure visible in front, therefore there must surely be one *behind*; yet

James, who is at her back, has no speculation in his eye, and he does not offer to fetch a shawl to hide her ruins, so it can't be *there*. It is certainly very mysterious. How delightful it is to sit still, and to know that we shall not be called upon to provide conversation; for of all the hard tasks the governor sets us, that is the hardest. When we were small children we were ordered to be silent, and bade never to open our lips in his presence. We never went to him in any of our childish joys or troubles, he took no interest in us; and we, who would have loved him if he had let us, came to have no feeling for him save that of fear. Now that we are growing up we are not afraid of him, but the old restraint lies heavy about us, and upon his bidding us to talk, lo! we find that the fountain is dry, and the harder we pump the less we bring up, and it is the daily puzzle of our lives to find »something to say«, or to hit upon some safe subject concerning which we may furbish up a few remarks. We are not afraid of him; but, nevertheless, it is a degrading and mortifying fact that, whereas behind his back we are bold as lions, before his face we are meek as lambs, while our voices remain obstinately in our boots. If our lives depended on it, we could not give one such Whoop

in his presence as we utter a hundred times a day when he is out of earshot.

The butler and footman hurry hither and thither, executing *impromptu* slides in their flights across country, that move us to admiration; but woe betide them if, in their slavish haste, they clink one plate against another, or fail to appear at papa's elbow, vegetable or sauce laden, the very moment he is ready for a fresh supply; while, as to the dishes, if, as soon as one disappears, another does not instantly take its place, his face becomes such a study of scorn and disgust as any living actor might seek in vain to imitate. We all sit round and watch him with a never-ending amazement, not unmingled with admiration, and wonder how on earth he does it. His face seems to be made of india-rubber, and takes every inflection and shade of ill-temper and uncharitableness. I believe, if we watched him till doomsday, we should see some fresh contortion every day. He does not confine himself to *looks* though—he acts. A dishcover in his hand becomes a shuttlecock that the battledore of his wrath may send into the grate, or out of the window, or after James's rapidly vanishing calves; it is impossible to tell where, we can only watch his eye, and speculate as to the probable direction it will take.

To-day, however, there are no such compliments flying; and, if Mr. Skipworth does now and then intercept a diabolical look intended for Simpkins, what then? He is used to the governor's little ways. And now dessert is on the table, and papa is telling the reverend gentleman (who occasionally hunts on a cob as fat as himself) a pleasing little anecdote about a parson who came to grief last winter in ——shire. Taking an awkward jump, he rolled off his horse into a pond, from whence he piteously besought a passing squire to extricate him. »No, no!« cried the squire, dashing his rowels into his horse's sides, »lie where you are! You won't be wanted till next Sunday!«

Mr. Skipworth, who, in his travels across country, has explored every pond, ditch, and brook for ten miles round, utters a feeble »Ha, ha, ha!« at which the governor, who is one of the pluckiest and hardest riders in the county, chuckles unkindly. Blessed hunting, that in winter takes him from the bosom of his family twice a week; and oh! long-tarrying first of September, when will you come, and set his feet among the stubble? We are eating strawberries, which, to my fancy, always smell and look so much more delicious than they taste. A jerk of papa's thumb presently dismisses us with

our mouths half filled, and we walk decorously past his chair, but once outside the shut door, scamper away like the wind, to vent the spirits that have been so tightly bottled up for the last two hours. We all go our different ways—Alice and Milly to stroll about the garden, Dolly and Alan to some mysterious haunt known only to themselves, Jack and I to our birds and beasts. They are a rascally lot, consisting of the lame, the halt, and the blind, and in any eyes but ours would not be worth a pinch of snuff. We have a dog without a tail, a canary without an eye, a raven without a leg, a crippled rabbit, and various other poor wretches who have been compelled by the force of circumstances to part with one or another of their natural appendages.

Papa is safe for another two hours. He and Skippy will tell tales one against the other that would beat Münchhausen into fits, and make him green with envy; so we let out the rabbits, the parrot, and the raven, and they follow behind as we take our way through the garden and paddock into the orchard.

»Don't you feel rather patriarchal, Jack?« I asked, looking over my shoulder to see that the rabbits are not nibbling at the raven, »like Noah?«

»No, I can't say I do,« says Jack. »How he would grin if he could hear you comparing our measly little menagerie to his. Why, he had thousands of 'em!«

»So he had,« I say, considering; »and how they all managed in the ark I can't imagine. They went in two and two, but of course they all had families; and, if there was only just room at first, they must have found it a tight fit after a bit.«

»Very,« says Jack absently. »I say, Nell, will you get up early to-morrow morning?«

»I don't know,« I answer doubtfully. »You don't want me to go fishing, do you?« On such occasions I enjoy the proud distinction of fixing wriggling worms on the hooks, while *he* has all the honour and glory of the undertaking, and eats the fish afterwards.

»No, you little silly, I'm not! It's something much better. Can you keep a secret?« (holding my arm tight).

»Of course I can!« I say indignantly; and, extraordinary as such an assertion may appear from a female, I *can*.

»Well,« says Jack deliberately, »if you're not nervous, you know, or squeamish, like other girls,

I'll take you with me; but you must not call out or scream, or anything of that kind, or we shall be caught, and there will be a shine in the tents of Shem.«

»I won't scream,« I say eagerly; »and you know I am not a bit like a real girl. You always say I am more than half a boy.«

»I'm going,« says Jack, eyeing me closely, »to see a pig killed.«

»A pig?—oh, Jack!—you don't mean it! They squeak so dreadfully! I'm sure it must hurt them very much!«

»Nonsense!« says Jack philosophically. »They are noisy brutes, and always make a fearful row over everything; besides, it's a very good thing they do squeak; for, if you happened to be frightened and called out, you know—for you are only a girl—the men would think it was the pig, not you.«

»Oh!« I say dubiously, for the idea that my voice cannot be mistaken from that of an expiring pig, has not before occurred to me.

»The fact is, Nell,« says Jack, glancing sharply at my face, »you're afraid, and I didn't think it of you—no, I didn't. However, I'll let you have till to-morrow to think it over; and if, when I throw a handful of gravel up at your window at five

o'clock, you are not dressed and ready, I shall know you are a coward.«

»No, you won't,« I say, »rebelling against this injustice, »if I don't go, it won't be because I am afraid, but because I don't want to see the—the—mess.«

»Make up your mind one way or the other,« says Jack carelessly; »if you don't come, I shan't say anything to you about it, but I shall know.«

We fall into a silence, and sit down under a tree, and the parrot who has been gravely walking behind with the rest of the riffraff, hops on to Jack's shoulder, and swears fluently. His name is Paul Pry, and he is a sharp and ungodly bird, who has picked up many wicked sayings, but never a good one. Jack brought him from school, and we are obliged to keep him dark, for fear the governor should overhear his talk, and make his head pay the penalty of his manners. He gets very drunk when he has a chance, and reels about in his cage like a very disreputable, tipsy old man, muttering »Polly very drunk«, in a boozy voice. He is smart, but he never said anything half as clever as that parrot of which Jack told me, who attended a show of his brethren, held for the purpose of giving a prize to the owner of the cleverest bird

present. He arrived last of all, looked round at the collection of feathered bipeds, cocked his eye at the company, and ejaculated, »What a d—d lot of parrots!« Alas! for morality, he won the prize, or so says Jack.

Under the trees it is very cool, very quiet. The sunbeams flicker faintly through the screen of green leaves and unripe fruit overhead; the gnats whirl giddily round and round, spending their one summer's day in ceaseless revolutions; the birds are singing their blithe, clear song, and though they sing all at once and each in a different key, there is not one note of discord in the whole concert. The sky is one stretch of deep intense blue, flecked with clouds that show white as snow against its vivid colour; a rustling, creeping little breeze, warm with the breath of new-mown hay and dog roses, is stealing about us, frolicking softly with our hair and lips; and as I lie flat on the grass that makes so yielding and luxurious a couch for our young bodies, I am lulled into an exquisite dreamy sensation of delight at the mere fact of existing on this bountiful, rich-hued, glorious June day. The parrot ceases to make naughty remarks, he puts his head on one side and appears to be thinking; perhaps he is remembering the days of

his youth, perhaps he too enjoys the perfect day and hour, who can tell? The rabbits wander about, the raven stands motionless on the one slender leg that must ache so often; Jack is silent, but for some prosaic reason I am certain, not because his soul is filled with pleasure.

»Nell,« he says presently, while I am wondering why the clouds fall into grotesque likenesses of earthly things, not heavenly—human faces, castles, cities, hills—»I'm going to the top of Inky field, will you come?«

Never yet did I disobey Jack's behest, so I sit up, but very unwillingly. »The governor will see us,« I say suggestively; »Inky field is right before the dining-room windows, you know.«

But Jack takes no heed to my caution, so we return to the garden by the way that we came, and inveigle all our animals into their abodes, save our crippled rabbit, who escapes to a verbena bed and there disports himself. A rabbit is an aggravating beast to catch; he has a way of remaining perfectly still till one's hand almost touches him, and then starting suddenly off in a jiggetty-jog fashion highly impertinent, while the pursuer measures his length upon the sward, angry and empty-handed. At last, however, he is caught,

and Jack carries him away, while I sit down on an adjacent seat, and fan myself with the top of my double skirt, which I use as duster, fan, or for ornament, indiscriminately. Mother and Mrs. Skipworth have just gone in, but every one else is walking about in a leisurely way; Alice and Milly under the south wall, Dolly and Alan sitting close together in the sun like two plump little partridges, dogs straying about, and fry dimly visible in the distance, everything in short looks peaceful and comfortable, when from the verandah issue two black figures, can it be?—Yes, it is Skippy and the governor! Is the wine corked, or have their stories run dry? I am too close to them to escape; not so, however, the rest, who vanish round corners, behind trees, over palings, anywhere, and the garden, that a moment ago was full, is now empty. Papa's approach may usually be known by the flight of everybody else in an opposite direction; and I think he has a vague suspicion of the fact, for he looks about him sharply, as he approaches. Jack, lucky fellow, has hidden himself in the rabbit hutch, and, from a well-known loophole, sleet his eye fixed upon me with a mixture of pity and self-gratulation. I have pulled my hat straight, set my feet in the first position, and am doing my

utmost to look modest, sabbatical, and cool. The last is the most difficult of all, and papa stops short and surveys me with the admiration that any new or particularly startling phase of my ugliness always evokes from him.

»What a *mawk!*« he says contemptuously, »can't you keep your mouth shut?«

I close it with a snap and a rebellious glance that he is about to call me to account for, when an unwary fry, venturing into the open, attracts his attention, and away he goes like a shot; horribly active is he, as any one can aver to whom he has given chase. I heave a deep sigh of relief, and turn away to make good my escape, when Mr. Skipworth lays a fat and detaining hand on my arm, and in an unctuous voice bids me sit down. He has got me into the seat, and wedged me in with his overflowing body before I got my breath back, and recognise the fact that I am in for a sermon, and that *he* will presently come back and finish me off. I cast a despairing glance at Jack, who is close prisoner as well as I, but oh! the rabbits won't stand upon their hind legs and preach him a sermon.

»My dear,« says Mr. Skipworth, closing his eyes slightly, whether overcome by the sun or

Madeira it would be hard to say, (how I hate being »my deared«), »did you hear the sermon to-day?«

»Yes, sir.«

»And what did I say?«

»Something or other about Methuselah.«

»No. I spoke of grace, the effects of grace. Without grace,« he continues, folding his fat hands, and simmering gently in the hot sunshine like a seal, »we are lost, vile, miserable creatures, lower than the beasts of the field.«

»You and I may be,« I say stoutly, »but mother isn't, she is much more like an angel.«

»You are a wicked girl,« he says, turning slowly and surveying me, »you are also *ignorant*. Do you not know that all mankind is born in sin, and that even a newborn babe is tainted with evil? It would appear that the infant is aware of that fact, for what is the first thing it does on coming into the world?«

»It howls,« I say briefly.

»It weeps,« says Mr. Skipworth rebukingly, »and why does it weep?«

»Because it's hungry,« I say promptly.

»It does nothing of the sort,« he says irately,
»it weeps because it *knows it is born in sin.*«

»Oh, poor little soul,« I say, laughing immoderately, »I—I—beg your pardon, Mr. Skipworth, but—but it's such a ridiculous idea, as if it knew *anything.*«

»Your levity is exceedingly unbecoming, miss,« says my pastor, in a voice that reminds me of vinegar tasting through oil.

»I beg your pardon, I do really,« I say again, stifling my mirth as well as I can, »but when you were a baby—I suppose you were a baby once, Mr. Skipworth?«

»I suppose so,« he says stiffly.

»Did you never cry?«

»I have always been told,« he says pompously, »that I was an unusually reasonable infant, and that my voice was seldom heard.«

»Then you could not have been born in sin,« I say triumphantly, »for you said just now babies cried *because* they were sinful, and of course if they don't cry they can't be sinful; don't you see, sir?«

But Mr. Skipworth does not see; my impudence has at last had the desired effect of making him

turn his back upon me, and as he stiffly rises I make my escape, barely in time though, for I am scarcely hidden when the governor appears round the corner, looking red and heated, and as though the fry had led him a chase for which there will be a heavy reckoning to pay by-and-by.

CHAPTER III.

»The morn in russet mantle clad
Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastern hill.«

It is five o'clock in the morning. Through my open window come the pure notes of the lark's first song, the cloth-of-gold roses nod their creamy heads in at me, heavy with dew-drops, and whisper, »Come out! come out!« Yes, but surely they don't mean to say, »*Come out, and see a pig killed.*« My mind has somehow or other made itself up, and though I every moment expect to hear Jack's footfall below, I am attired in a nightgown, no more. Who that has tasted the first spotless freshness of the early morning, could go back to dull, senseless sleep in that white bed, yonder? When Jack is gone I will dress and go out into the lanes and fields, and get a bunch of fresh wild flowers. I will—there is Jack. I mount the window and present my white-robed form to his astonished and disgusted gaze.

»So you're not coming?« he asks in an indignant whisper, heedful of Amberley, whose room

is below mine, but reassured by the rhythmic regularity of her snores. »So you're a—«

»Don't be angry,« I say, imploringly, »I'm not a coward, and I'll do anything else you like, but I can't do that.«

»Oh! I dare say,« he says, scornfully, »I dare say! Well, I'm going, but before I go I may as well tell you that I'm disappointed in you. I thought, mind you, Nell, I thought you were plucky enough to be a boy; but I was mistaken, you're only a girl.«

»I know I am,« I say, almost in tears, »that's just why I can't go and see it, boys feel differently about those things!«

»I should hope so,« says Jack, significantly, »I should hope so,« and turns on his heel, and goes his way, pigsty-wards, leaving me to the miserable conviction that he is perfectly right, and I am a very small and cowardly person indeed.

By-and-by I pluck up sufficient spirit to put on the despised female garments that I hate so thoroughly. How cumbrous, and useless, and ridiculous they are! how my gowns, petticoats, crinolines, ribbons, ties, cloaks, hats, bonnets, gloves, tapes, hooks, eyes, buttons, and the hundred and one et ceteras that make up a girl's costume, chafe and

irritate me! what would I not give to be able to leave them all in a heap, and step into Jack's cool, comfortable, easy, grey garments? When I am dressed I go through Alice and Milly's room on tip-toe. A sunbeam is lying on Alice's nut-brown head; a blackbird is singing on the windowsill, but she sleeps soundly on. Out in the garden the grass is all silvered over with dew, and the flowers are opening their beautiful eyes one by one; all night they have stood pale and still, but now, with the first quivering beams of the sun, they have awakened, and stirred, and trembled, turning eagerly towards their king, who is rising in such pomp of amber glory out of the great eastern plains of translucent sea-green sky. As yet there is that faint, chilly freshness in the morning air that is like some strange, intangible, wind-blown perfume, as though the breath of the moon-lit night had tarried behind, and was merging itself into the dawning warmth of the morning.

There is a nameless stir and throb of expectancy in the air, as though all nature were awaiting the advent of her master; field and meadow, flower and garden, stretching out towards his golden splendour and swift vivifying beams.

When I have fed the animals,—who are as

wide-awake as though they had the work of the world to perform, instead of nothing to fill the long hours but sleeping and eating, while, strange contradiction! the human beings, who have their lives to carve out, their names to make, and their souls to save, sleep soundly and long, awakened, not by the sun or the birds, or because they have had rest enough, but because (oh, prosaic reason!) they are *called*,—I take my way across the dew-spangled meadows, where the cows are being milked, and John the milkman and Molly the dairy-maid are sitting on contiguous stools, and flirting at the top of their voices, loudly confiding to each other those gentle secrets that are usually supposed to be of a somewhat private character. There is nobody to listen though, save the brook, the birds, and me; and as I am behind them, they are not put out of countenance by discovering that I have been an involuntary listener to their love talk. After all, I dare say, flirtation at five o'clock in the morning is as agreeable and amusing as at any other time, and a great deal more sweet and wholesome than in the evening. I do not get much of a nosegay, for June, bountiful month as she is, gives not half the wild flowers that follow spring's footsteps, and gem her mantle so precious; I only

find some dog roses, travellers' joy, a few ragged robins, a handful of moon daisies, some meadow-sweet, and honeysuckle.

Turning into the orchard, I run against Jack coming from the opposite direction; he withdraws himself with dignity, but does not look very angry, so I proceed to try and make my peace after a sneaking feminine fashion.

»Was it *very* nice?« I ask in a propitiatory tone.

»First-rate; wouldn't have missed it for anything.«

»Did it squeak much?«

»Awfully; didn't you hear him? There will be some prime bacon though, and I shall take a ham back to school.«

Bacon! ham! Three hours ago it was a breathing, enjoying, reasonable pig, *now*——

»It is Pimpernel Fair to-morrow,« I say, suggestively, hoping by a change of subject to divert Jack's thoughts from my delinquencies, upon which I am certain they are running.

»I know; but it's no good, the governor won't let us go.«

»Mother is going to ask him; let us pray that the answer may be favourable.«

Eight o'clock strikes as we turn in at the back door, and at the sound we both start as if we had been shot. To drag off our hats, and make a rush for the breakfast-parlour, is the work of a moment; and by the skin of our teeth are we saved, for by great good luck the governor this morning enters the room at ten seconds past the hour, instead of on the stroke, as is his wont.

Now there are laws and laws in our house, to break either of which is a very serious matter, but to be late for prayers is *crime*. To fall sick, tear our clothes, tell lies, steal fruit, and roll in the flower-beds, is bad, and will be punished accordingly, but to be late for prayers!—far better were it for that luckless wight that he or she had never been born. I wonder if, when I am quite old, I shall ever be able to forget that awful sickening moment, when, having torn down the stairs at headlong speed, I found the door shut, and heard papa's voice booming away with angry fervour inside?

Our family devotions are conducted in a curious fashion, but one that is eminently satisfactory to our youthful and irreligious minds. The governor goes through chapter, prayer, and benediction as hard as he can pelt, without a moment's pause,

from beginning to end, and when the chapter is ended, and we have rapidly reversed ourselves, we are scarcely settled on our knees when the book, closing with a smack on Amen! shoots us all up into the perpendicular again. Every now and then the morning scamper is agreeably diversified by the unseemly conduct of the canaries, who, when papa begins to read, begin to sing, and the louder he reads, the more shrilly they shriek, until he pauses to say, in a voice of thunder, »Take those wretched birds down!« then settles to his stride again with a furious countenance, while the culprits, from an abased position on the floor, twitter derisively.

Prayers being over, breakfast is brought, and partaken of much as the Jews partook of the Pass-over (save that we have seats), in hot haste and the shortest possible time.

I think papa's digestion has been murdered long ago, and ours are on the high road to destruction, but, fast as we eat our meals, we heartily wish we could do it faster and get away.

This morning we are cudgelling our brains as usual to find a remark that shall be neither too fresh, nor too stale, nor too familiar, nor too dangerous, for ventilation, and every natural subject

that suggests itself to our minds we reject in turn. The governor would not understand it, or he would wonder at our impudence, or—something. We are all nervously anxious to talk; it is from no obstinacy or contumaciousness that we sit tongue-tied, but somehow the stream that flows so overbountifully among ourselves, is in his presence reduced to a few scanty drops. Amberley is pouring out the coffee, limp, and meek, and drab, and fair, with putty-coloured curls, concerning which we have never ceased to admire the self-restraint that has restrained the governor from pulling them in his frequent rages.

»Do you think it is going to rain, papa?« asks Alice, making her small votive offering in a voice that refuses to come boldly forth, but seems to be strangled half-way. The sky is one clear vault of blue, and it has not rained for a week.

»I don't know,« says the governor crossly. Apparently he has seen the pumping-up process, and is not grateful for the effort.

Alice looks over at Milly with a glance that plainly says, »Your turn now;« for it is a point of honour with us that when one makes a remark, each shall follow in turn, and thus divide the labour of conversation.

»Dorly killed a lot more snails last night,« says Milly, looking at papa; but the snails go the way of the weather, and no notice whatever is vouchsafed to this delicate *morceau*.

It is Jack's turn now, but he is stolidly eating his breakfast, with a mean and reprehensible indifference to his duty; therefore it devolves upon me.

»The pig was killed this morning,« I say, starting with a tolerably loud voice, and dying gradually into a very little one. »It made such a noise!« But, alas! the pig goes the way of the snails and the weather.

There is an anxious silence, broken only by Amberley's meek voice offering the master of the house more coffee, but upon being told it is filthy stuff she collapses, as do we, and sit counting the moments to our departure. Jack sneezes violently, and we look at him gratefully; it makes an agreeable little diversion, but he must not do it twice, or he will be ordered out of the room. Papa has finished his bacon and coffee, and we are just thinking we may venture to rise and make our escape, when his angry voice makes us bound in our seats.

»Can't you talk, some of you?« he asks, eyeing

us wrathfully. »There you sit, gobble, gobble, gobble, with never a word among the whole lot, and behind my back you can bawl the house down; a set of wretched dummies!« And so he dismisses us with a few more expressions of admiration and good-will.

»I am afraid Pimpernel Fair looks rather bad,« says Alice, when we reach the school-room.

»After all it is not much of it!« says Milly.

No, it is not; and in our heart of hearts we despise it, with its one circus, its penny peep-show, and its fat woman; but it is better than nothing, and when one has looked upon nothing but the face of one's own family for twelve months, anything is agreeable to the eye, and now that it seems to be receding in the distance, Pimpernel Fair looks very attractive indeed!

Amberley comes in—Amberley to whom it is given to labour heavily at the tillage of our brains, and whom we look upon as a sedate and amiable old cow, who never kicks up her heels or does anything unexpected, but gives down knowledge in any quantity or quality whenever we choose to apply for it. She is a queer creature, Amberley. We used to play her tricks, and try to drive her out, as we did all our other governesses; but she

opposed a passive resistance to all our endeavours, that in the end conquered us. We might as well have knocked our heads by the hour against a stone wall. For oh! she is so meek! Give us a passionate person, an impulsive person, a person who loudly declares she will have her own way; but a meek, obstinate woman, *no one* can stand against her!

Lessons begin, and after our different fashions we attack the Tree of Knowledge. Alice goes at it gaily, and with a good heart; Milly weeps at its prickly rind; I skirmish round it; and Dolly and Alan sit down before it with moderate appetite. Happy Jack! who goes by with his dog at his heels; and, unlucky me! who possess the tastes and spirit of a boy and the useless body and petticoats of a girl!

CHAPTER IV.

»Jog on, jog on, the foot-path way,
And merrily hent the stile-a;
A merry heart goes all the way,
Your sad tires in a mile-a.«

WE are waiting in the school-room for mother, who has gone with a serene front, but (we believe) trembling knees, to ask her lord and master's gracious consent to our setting out for Pimpernel Fair. She has been absent a quarter of an hour, which we are inclined to think a hopeful sign, as his »Noes« are usually short and sharp, and for him to condescend to argue a matter promises well. Here she comes! We tumble one over the other to the door, and fling it wide. No need to ask her; she has »Yes!« written all over her in big capitals. As she sits down we swarm round her until she looks like something good encompassed by a hive of buzzing, noisy bees.

»You are coming with us, eh, mother?« I ask eagerly.

»No, dear, I think not; there is baby, you know.«

»We are not going to have all the fry at our heels, I hope?« asks Jack, with some anxiety.

»The two nurses are going with four of them, and Miss Amberley will take you elder ones.«

»Hurrah!« cries Jack; »if there's anything I hate it's going out in dozens. And what time are we to be back?«

»Six o'clock. And don't make yourselves ill with gingerbreads, dears.«

»Ill!« we all echo in chorus; »who could get ill on nothing?«

»We have not a rap, mother,« I put in on my own account. »There was a shilling somewhere among us last week, but it was so valuable, and we took so much care of it, that somehow it got lost. One of us hid it away, and forgot where we put it.«

»I will give you a shilling each,« says mother, »and you must make it do.«

She takes out her purse that is so much too slender for the size of her family; and though we all scorn the scanty shilling that is to fall to our share, we do not say so. Shall we give one additional pang to that tender, gentle heart? The

governor must have his hunting, his shooting, his horses. We must be kept so long without a sight of the Queen's countenance as almost to forget what she is like; and I am certain that, when we are grown up, we shall be spendthrifts. When mother has given us our shillings and kissed us all round, she goes away, and we also depart to make our toilets, and beautify ourselves according to our scanty means and several lights. Alice puts on a white hat with a long white feather, sole tail of an ostrich that the family possesses, and considered by us Adairs to be the *ne plus ultra* of beauty and fashion. Whatever our other shortcomings may be in the matter of dress, when that feather is in our midst, and Alice's blooming face is under that feather, we feel respectable, and defy anybody to beat us. She also wears a white cloak and a black silk dress, and when it is all put on, where will you in the whole of England find a fairer, sweeter sixteen-year-old, than our Alice? Milly has put on her out-door gear as uncompromisingly as usual. Jack appears with a button-hole the size of a small cabbage, that gives him an uncommonly gay and festive air, and I having tilted my Leghorn hat to the back of my head, for the better observation of men and matters, we descend, and find Amber-

ley awaiting us in a green bonnet and with a large smut on her nose. We admire the former, but are all much too delicate to point out the latter to her, so it goes to the fair with the rest.

Pimpernel is only a mile away, but a noonday mile in June is a long one, and by the time we reach the High Street we are very hot indeed, and very thirsty. It is the second day of the fair, and the fat farmers and their fatter beasts have waddled off the scene, while their smart wives and daughters have appeared upon it, and are walking about in raiment compared with which Joseph's coat was a mere joke, exchanging jests and cracking jokes with their friends and looking, thanks to the exceeding heat, very sticky and exceedingly moist. Behind and about prance their maid-servants and hinds; every Jill who has a Jack hangs fondly to his arm, and while her large crinoline hangs affectionately against his legs, she casts scornful and triumphant glances at the unappropriated Jill who sidles by, deeply conscious of her forlorn and degraded state.

Hard by Punch is setting a bright example to the British householder as to the management of his wife and family, and we pause under the shadow of lawyer Trask's door to see the instruct-

ive little drama played out, and the ends of justice defeated.

In the market-place is a queer edifice that looks like a gigantic house of cards, and upon the steps thereof, apparently too solid for the shabby structure, stands a man beating a gong that rends the air with its hideous tom-tom!—that is the circus. To our right a crowd of white-waistcoated, blue-coated, shiny-faced youths are shooting for nuts at a gallery which is presided over by a young person with black eyes and blacker ringlets, a brazen countenance and a nimble tongue. She seems to have as unlimited a supply of chaff as of nuts, and holds her own against all comers. Farther on is the peep-show, beyond that the merry-go-round, upon whose wooden horses the boys and girls are clinging with such giddy, delighted grasp; and round the corner the fat woman bursts upon our view, or rather her picture does, which has much the same effect. She wears a low-necked gown and short skirts, displaying a calf of which the circumference is about equal to our united waists. Her neck—— We turn away shuddering.

»Now what are we going to see first?« asks Jack.

What, indeed! it is an *embarras de richesses*.

»The circus,« says Alice.

»The fat woman,« says Milly, who has been much struck.

»The peep-show,« says Jack.

»Anywhere out of the sun,« say I; so Jack, being the only male present, gets his own way, and we are speedily lifting the dirty red curtain, and standing on forms arranged in a circle, beholding improving illustrations of battle, murder, and sudden death.

The first scene represents a field, strewn with dead bodies, whose heads, arms, and legs, are scattered around them in graceful confusion; a few horses seem to have got into the *mêlée* by mistake, and lie on their backs with all four legs turned up piteously to the gory sky, as who should say, »We kicked to the last!«

The beauties of this affecting picture are forcibly pointed out to us by the showman, who describes it as being the scene of a »most 'orrible massacre,« as depicted by a »hi witness«.

We are next treated to an artistic study of murder in low life, the murderer being in hot pursuit of a young female in a night-gown, whose hair sets out straight as porcupine's quills from her head, and within an inch of the itching fingers of

her pursuer, while behind him are laid out in an ascending scale the dead bodies of an old man, an old woman, and a child, the same being the victims he has just finished off.

In the midst of the showman's description of this *tableau vivant*, his voice suddenly ceases; turning to ascertain the cause of his silence, we find that he has temporarily retired behind a pot of beer, »Not before it was required,« as he remarks when he returns to his duties. It strikes me that before the day is over, his explanations will be somewhat hazy and obscure. And we see several more horrors which Amberley regards with extreme disfavour, as being possibly subversive of our morals.

When his stock of delicacies is exhausted, we adjourn to the pastry-cook's, and eat sandwiches, buns, and tarts, with extreme relish, due heedfulness, and the nicest discrimination, for we are limited as to money, and must get its worth, if we can.

»I could eat 'em all!« murmured Jack, on our first arrival, gazing fondly at a pyramid of jam tarts before him, but experience soon teaches him that his eye is decidedly larger than his stomach, and after a decent tuck-in he is satisfied. Having

drunk our lemonade, we betake ourselves across the square to where the circus man is still sturdily beating his gong for the one o'clock performance, and mount the rickety steps, and go through the entrance to the red baize-covered seats that circle round the arena strewn with saw-dust. Although we know it all by heart, and just what is coming, what a thrill of excitement runs through us as we glance around us, at the eager faces of the poor folks and their children seated in the lowest place; at the dissipated pieces of orange peel that are strewn hither and thither, suggestive remnants of the visits of those who could enjoy themselves without striving to be »genteel«; at the men with their brazen instruments, that will presently burst forth in a volume of sound more startling than dulcet; at our neighbours and their olive branches, who, like us, possess the upper seats in the synagogue, but who do not look at us, oh! dear no! The governor's sins are visited very fully upon our heads, and though he never goes abroad to encounter either good looks or bad, his sins will be visited on his luckless children to the third and fourth generation.

And now the entertainment has begun; the pretty little girl in pink is taking her flying leaps

through the hoops, and our hearts beat high with pride and delight as she clears them successfully, but a shiver runs through us as once she jumps short and falls. What a piteous quiver there is on the poor little painted face as the frowning, black-browed man who cracks the whip, scolds her in a low fierce voice; how we hate him, and would like to make him suffer as he is making her! The clowns come in and make their jokes; old as the hills, no doubt, but to us exquisitely fresh, and we greet them with the hearty zest and admiration that no laughter, save that of childhood, ever knows. Presently something very dreadful happens; the hero of the piece (it is a grand piece, with robbers and horses and ladies and a splendid fight) who has been killed is being carried out, laid very straight and stiff on the shoulders of four men, with his eyes tightly shut, and the band is playing the Dead March in Saul very slowly and impressively, with a pause of several seconds between each note, when the music abruptly ceases, and with a discordant crash, musicians, instruments and all, vanish from our sight, and nothing is to be seen of them save a great dust that rises from their ruins. What has happened? The dead man is lowered to the ground, upon

which he sits up and stares. We all gaze with fascinated and dilated eyes at the box from which the men have vanished. Are they killed? But sounds of wrath, of disgust and vituperation, mingled with a rattling of bones and brass instruments, speedily reassure us on that point, and before long the missing gentlemen creep out one by one, very red in the face and dusty in the throat, and take up their station on the benches, which may possibly be trusted not to serve them the dirty trick the box has done. Once settled, they take up the burden of their Dead March where they laid it down, the dead man carefully stretches himself out on his bearers' shoulders, and the piece is brought to a decent conclusion with »God save the Queen«, to cover all deficiencies.

The sunshine makes our eyes blink as we emerge into it, and bend our steps towards the fat woman, to whom we must assuredly make our bow. The apartment in which that august lady receives us is out of all proportion to her charms, being in fact but a caravan upon wheels, across the hinder part of which is drawn a musty curtain, that we dimly imagine hides unsavoury sights. As she lifts it and stands before us, I involuntarily draw back and get behind Jack, and Dolly gets

behind me; her ponderous foot shakes the boarding as she approaches, and her huge body oscillates from side to side, like a badly filled sack set upright in a cart. It is impossible to help feeling that if she happened to tread on one of us, we should be crushed into pulp; for once report has not lied, and her picture has failed to do her charms justice, or represent her as she really is. »Look at 'er!« cries the showman in a voice of rapture hitching up her already short petticoats with his cane, and indicating first one colossal leg, then another: »*Look* at 'er, ladies and gentlemen! Did ever yer see sich flesh, sich size, sich *proporshun*? And mind yer, it's all real genuine bony-fidy fat; no make-believes, shams, or saw-dust in this exhibition! Look 'ere!« and he prods her with his stick in her overflowing sides, and he pinches her fat neck and arms as though she were a prize ox or sheep. »Turn round!« he says, and she turns slowly as though on a pivot, and displays a back that is such a mountain of flesh as I have seen nowhere, save on the body of a prize pig. As she faces us again, a fat smile of pleased complacency dawns on her features at marking our amazement and admiration of her manifold beauties. At her knee, but overlooked in the

neighbourhood of her mountainous presence, stands a tiny dwarf, who nearly dislocates his neck in peeping up at her. It is plain that he admires her beyond all earthly things, and that she is to him, not only the lode-star of his existence, but the type of everything that is comely and pleasant to the eye in woman. Decidedly impressed, we take our departure, and repair to seek our fairings in the smartly laid out stalls in the shadow of the old grey market-house. We buy mother a thimble, not that we are aware she is in want of one, but a silver thimble is a nice, useful, comfortable sort of thing, that is sure to come in handy if you wait long enough, and we have no notion, we Adairs, of spending our infrequent money in kick-shaws, or merely ornamental presents. We sometimes give her a purse by way of a change, and when she has had enough of them, we present her with a prayer-book; so there is a good deal of variety after all.

We pause for a minute or two to listen to the amazing lies of a cheap Jack, compared with whom Ananias was the most veracious man on record; and I, at least, look with some envy at the merry-go-round, remembering a day many years ago when I escaped from nurse, and surreptitiously took a

ride on a side-saddled wooden pony that stood beside one ridden by Johnny Stubbs the sweep's son, and was enjoying myself with all my heart, when a heavy hand made a clutch at my vanishing garments, and nurse's voice said in deepest wrath, »I'm *ashamed* of you, Miss Nell!«

The fun of the fair is just beginning as we turn our faces homeward towards Silverbridge. By-and-by it will become a frolic, later on grow into a carouse, last of all degenerate into a hurly-burly, where women will be seeking their husbands, and the same will be shaking hands with the town pumps, and attempting to walk home in a circle. Most of the sober folks are leaving like us, and in the cool lanes, athwart which the sun is laying dark shadows, Lubin is kissing Phillis's ruddy and sticky cheek, blessedly unconscious of our near vicinity. With what honest delight do they gaze on each other's ugly red faces, and how enjoyingly does the smack! smack! of their salutes come to our ears? The lady is not coy, and kisses him full as often as he does her, and almost as loudly. They are beautiful in each other's eyes, and long may their love last!

»I wonder,« I say to myself, looking at Alice's

flower-like face, »if any one will ever love *her* like that? or—or—*me*?«

Presently we overtake the fry whom we have once or twice come across in the fair and avoided successfully; very gummy and warm and dirty and happy they look. If the governor could only see them! Fortune smiles on us to-day; we do not meet him in the court or in the hall or on the stairs, so we are able to retire in peace to change our dusty clothes.

»Thank goodness, there won't be a walk to-night!« says Alice, sitting down restfully in her white petticoat on the broad window-sill. Thank goodness, indeed! Walks are the plagues of our lives and the terror of our existence. I do not mean those nondescript leisurely rambles that Jack and I are partial to taking, or the saunters that Alice and Milly affect; I mean a three or four-mile race over hill and dale at the governor's heels, which leaves us with aching, blown bodies, sore hearts, and angry souls. We resort to various cowardly and sneaking devices to get out of these excursions, but altogether in vain; severe stomach-ache even, and a prompt retirement to bed, avail us nothing. Papa is up to that trick, and we are promptly unearthed, dressed, and sent forth

with the rest. We have even, on occasions, tried the desperate expedient of salts and senna, but even that cruel remedy failed us, for papa, believing our illness to be only another form of humbug, insisted on our accompanying him; therefore, from that day to this, we have left Messrs. S. & S. alone.

The Adair family out a-walking is a sight to be seen. The governor leads the way, steaming on in front all alone, like a ship in full sail, while behind him his family stretch out like a pack of beagles, puffing, blowing, groaning, gasping, the elders well up to the fore, the youngsters, by reason of the shortness of their miserable little legs, straggling behind, while last of all comes Amberley, doing her duty like the Christian woman that she is, and praying that her second wind may come quickly. From time to time papa turns and surveys our scarlet and distressed countenances with a grim smile. After all I believe he has some sense of humour, and only manages to support his own discomforts by witnessing the infinitely greater ones of his children. Past cool sweet fields, where the cows are taking their meals at their leisure—happy cows, who have no father to harry them! — past easy stiles and broad flat stones to which our bodies seriously incline; up hill and down dale,

across fields and down lanes, with never a pause for breath or flower or fern, and so home again »in linked sweetness long drawn out«.

Next to those scampers we hate drives. Papa has several conveyances in which he jeopardizes the lives of his family, and makes our »too fretful hair« rise from our heads. First in danger is a very high gig, in which he drives a powerful rakish chestnut with a rolling eye, who invariably runs away twice or thrice whenever he goes out. In this, knowing her fears, he loves to take out mother, who has some respect for her own neck, seeing that it is the only one she is ever likely to possess, and by hook or by crook, she usually manages to get out of going. Now and then, however, she is fairly caught, and drives from the door with a backward look at her assembled flock, that has in it the solemnity of a dying farewell. Next in danger to the gig is a mail phaeton, drawn by a pair of fiery cobs, thoroughbreds, and matched to a hair, in which two of us girls are always made to sit, occupying ingloriously enough the seat intended for a man-servant. Many and many a time have we clung to each other with our breath gone, while the horses thundered on in their mad career, and the snapping of a rein or the smallest

obstacle in the way would have probably sent us all to kingdom come. Providence, however, who apparently keeps special angels to watch over reckless people, has always brought us safely home, and will, I hope, continue to do so; for it is an ugly thought to be dashed into little bits on a heap of stones, with a horse's grinding hoofs hammering your face. Mother has a basket carriage with two fat grey ponies, which are so far beneath papa's notice, that they enjoy a meed of peace no other animals in the stable possess, and behind them we youngsters have many a pleasant amble and comfortable confab.

»Are you girls coming down to tea this evening, or to-morrow morning?« asks Jack, putting his head in at the door. »The governor is just coming up the carriage drive!«

CHAPTER V.

»Wooring, wedding, and repenting, is as a Scotch jig, a measure, and a cinque-pace: the first suit hot and hasty, like a Scotch jig, and full as fantastical; the wedding mannerly-modest as a measure, full of state and ancientry; and then comes repentance, and with his bad legs falls into the cinque-pace faster and faster, till he sink into his grave.«

JACK and I went to see a wedding this morning that began yesterday, and was only finished to-day. It was not a mannerly-modest one though; far from it. We make a rule of attending all the weddings and funerals we can, but school hours are a sad hindrance to me, and Jack often has to go by himself. We always watch the mourners with great attention, and have, after careful study of their countenances, made up our minds that it is almost always those who care least who are most demonstrative, and that dry-eyed grief is far more deep and deadly than a tempest of sobs and cries and wails. Not that poor people as a rule regret their dead very passionately; their hard, dull, working lives are so heavy to bear, that a little more or less misery matters but little. You

will even see a mother with many children taking some comfort from the thought that the Lord has »provided« for the little ones taken away from her.

But I am forgetting all about yesterday's wedding. It was at a convenient hour, nine o'clock. So, having watched papa safely into the stables, we were soon across the lawn and churchyard, and in our usual hiding-place in the organ-loft. Mr. Skipworth was already waiting before the altar, book in hand, and looking decidedly cross, when the bride and bridegroom came in, followed by a few people. We couldn't see their faces, but there seemed something very wrong about the bridegroom's back, for he was lurching, tripping, and rolling from side to side, and, strange to say, the bride, a stout and buxom young woman, was supporting him! They reached the altar, and Mr. Skipworth began to read the service, but when it became necessary for the young man to make his vows, nothing was heard but a series of hiccoughs; and although the bride pinched and shook and whispered him energetically, no responses were forthcoming, and in another minute he had fallen an inert mass upon the chancel floor.

»Oh my!« exclaimed Jack in high glee, »he's *drunk*.«

Mr. Skipworth shut the book in disgust and walked away; but the intrepid bride, with no trace of anger, raised her man, and with her friends' assistance conveyed him to the door.

We followed the couple to the village as far as we dared, and during the day contrived to get posted up as to the latest particulars. At noon he was fast asleep, with his head on the bride's lap; at three he was recovering, and calling loudly for beer; at five he was locked up by her friends for safety; at nine he was sitting with his head in a basin of cold water, forced thereto by the same in hopes of enabling him to go to church on the morrow. And their indefatigable efforts have been rewarded, for this morning he came up to time, and was able to make his vows, if somewhat unsteadily, at least audibly. The bride's beaming face was a study as she bore her swinish and sulky mate away. Truly matrimony must have had charms for *her*.

It is a never-ending puzzle to Jack and me how people can like being married. Dorley has a wife, a very fine woman, who beats him, and of whom he is intensely proud. Once she rather overdid it; and as a worm will turn so did Dorley; and, having represented to her that her little attentions

were incompatible with the respectability of appearance Colonel Adair required from his gardener, it was agreed that they should separate, she possessing one half of his wages and household goods, he the other. They had not been apart a week when Dorley came and gave papa warning. »He could not live without his missus,« he said, »and he was going to her.« And go he did; but matters were ultimately arranged, and Dorley came back to us with his spouse, who beats him more than ever, to his great satisfaction and content.

Dorley, however, if meek at home is not meek to us. He is a tyrant, and looks upon the fruits and flowers of the garden as *his*, while we are little thieves and pickpockets, who menace the same. And oh! he has to be sharp, has Dorley, or there would be never a gooseberry, peach, or apricot to send in for dessert. I wonder where he is this afternoon? I wonder where everybody is? Though I have been prowling round the garden for half an hour I have not met a soul.

It is very mean of Jack to go off and leave me in this way—on a Wednesday afternoon too. I did *not* think he would bear me so much malice about the pig; boys aren't forgiving like girls. I wonder what he is doing? Fishing? Bathing? Taking

a scramble across country with Pepper? It is too hot for that, for Jack loves his ease as well as anybody else. I wonder if any apples have fallen from the quarantine tree? I turn my steps toward it and look about; there is not one on the grass. I cast my eyes upwards, and mark with approving eyes the rosy fruit hanging so stirlessly on the boughs. If only a breeze would spring up, and give those boughs a gentle shake, down would fall the apples at my feet, but the sky is one hard, fierce glare, and there is not the ghostliest shadow of a breeze abroad on the land.

Looking begets longing, longing in a depraved and energetic mind begets acting; and seeing that the gentle gale my soul craves refuses to blow, I conceive the daring thought of myself acting the part of gentle zephyr. I look around; no one is to be seen. Dorley is invisible; the governor I saw fast asleep in the library a while ago; the coast is clear. In the twinkling of an eye I have swung myself up into the tree, and am shaking with a will. The fruit is falling in a bounteous red shower, when a voice directly below me makes me start so violently, that I drop the bough and lose my footing. But, alas! instead of respectably smiting mother earth with my nose, I remain

suspended, petticoats above, legs below. Even in this awful moment, the verse over the barber's shop comes into my mind—

»O Absalom! O Absalom! my poor, ill-fated son,
If thou hadst only worn a wig, thou hadst not been
undone.«

Only in this case, if I had been clad in Jack's clothes, not my own, I should not be undone. My face has disappeared into the crown of my sun bonnet in my abrupt descent, so I cannot see my discoverer. Can it be—*can* it be the governor? No, for if it had I should have received palpable evidence of his wrath before this.

»I wish your pa could see you,« says Dorley's deliberate voice, sounding more sweetly in my ears than ever did song of nightingale; »'ow he would whack you!«

»I know he would,« I murmur indistinctly from the depths of my bonnet. »Do, there's a good, kind Dorley, take me down!«

But Dorley has suffered many things at my hands, and now his day has come, he means to enjoy it for a little while.

»You've been a bad young lady to me, Miss Ullen,« he says slowly (and at the sound of his leisurely voice I aim a sudden kick at him with

my dangling legs, for oh! at any moment *he* may appear on the scene, and then——). »You and your beasts has trampled my flower-beds and messed my lawn beyond believing, and you've stole my paches, broken my glass, and misbehaved yerself ginerally; and if it wasn't for yer pa, and his being so vilent, I'd leave you there for an hour, Miss Ullen, I would. Pr'aps, with the Lord's mercy, it might be a warning to yer. But I don't want to have nothing to do with murder, so I'll take yer down this time; only if ever I finds yer a disgracing yerself in this misbecoming manner again, I'll leave yer there, Miss Ullen, sure as my name's Dorley. And kickin' won't do no good when you're in the wrong, miss; leastways, it won't wi' *me*.«

He departs slowly in search of the steps, while I dangle at my ease in creeping, curdling terror, lest even now the governor may be turning the corner.

Dorley comes back at last, and disentangles me with some difficulty, and oh! with what joy do I once more plant my waggling feet on firm ground; never, never will I play the part of gentle zephyr again.

In the depths of my pocket, tenderly hoarded,

fondly cherished, lurks a sixpence, which I disinter and hand to Dorley with my lips pursed up very tight.

»There, take it,« I say; »it's for you.«

»No, no, Miss Ullen,« says Dorley, holding it out in his earth-stained hand, »I won't take it from 'ee! Happen you want it worse than I do!«

»Dorley,« I say, drawing myself up with dignity, »I am amazed at you! Sixpences are *no* object with me, or—or—shillings, or—half-crowns.«

Having uttered this last astounding lie without winking, I walk away with a stately strut that I hope impresses him, and which is, I suppose, born of the occasion, for I never owned it before.

What a burning, breathless, sleepy afternoon it is! The earth seems lapped in a nerveless, luxurious, indolent slumber. The very flowers seem to have gone to sleep, and the birds to be taking a siesta. Passing the school-room window, I see Alan the solemn-faced, who is apparently not so overcome with heat as the rest of the world, indulging in the rather active recreation of spinning Dolly round and round on the top of the large school-room table. It is evidently a new treat to them, and I have not time to give the warning that painful experience has taught Jack and me,

when whirr! whiff! the top of the table flies to the other end of the room, shooting Dolly into the fireplace, and Alan dances up and down, as though the perils his toes have just escaped make him anxious to assure himself of their integrity.

Piteous whimpers and groans from the fireplace announce extensive and painful damages to the poor little maid who was riding aloft so triumphantly a minute ago. Bruises and tears are however alike merged in the all-absorbing question of how the table is to be joined together again. In the middle of the room its legs stand stark and bare, like a thin little man from whom his ample and overflowing spouse has departed.

All this while they have not been aware of my presence on the scene, but now as I remark, »A very pretty amusement, certainly!« with all the gravity and weight my thirteen years entitle me to display, they hail me joyfully, and with my assistance, and much puffing and straining, the divorced parts are put together, and Dolly has time to bewail her misfortunes, and Alan to rub his unharmed shins responsive.

Pursuing my prowl, I wander round the irregularly built, three-sided court, and am shortly

awakened from my abstraction by hearing a door bang violently.

Have you ever lived in a house, reader, where the merest chance sound, the bang of a door, the sound of a loud voice, or a distant noise, makes you start up, your nerves tingling, your heart beating, your body trembling, while an instantaneous photograph of falling chairs, flying crockery, broken bell-ropes, and dancing china, with a dervish dancing in the midst of the confusion, presents itself vividly to your eyes?

All this I see when that distant bang reaches my ears. To-day it means »Bills.« It is an insult to papa's understanding for any one to dare ask for his money. We must be clothed, it is true, and fed, but shall the paying for these small trifles be taken as a legitimate, every-day duty? Perish the thought! It is disgraceful, it is unseemly, it is an upside-downness of everything, that these rascals should, week after week, be sending their paltry bits of blue paper in to him, and he resents the impertinence accordingly. Ah, poor mother! You are in the midst of that hurly-burly yonder; when I am older I will walk straight in and share it with you, now I should be ordered out. Experience tells me that the sooner I hide myself the

better, for when papa is in one of these furies there is no safety for any one from garret to coal cellar; in this mood he may even feel that a slaughter of the innocents is necessary for the rehabilitation of his peace of mind, so I hastily retire to the rabbit hutch, which is in a central position, and from thence watch the march of events. From my coign of vantage I presently see him come out, and throw his eyes hither and thither in search of prey, then he goes down through the garden and out of sight. I am just thinking that perhaps the house will be safer than my present quarters, when in the distance I see dogs, fowls, fry, nurses, Amberley, Jack, Alice, Milly, and Dolly, all flying towards the house, like autumn leaves before the wind. No need to ask what is behind them, only one person on earth could have that effect; so, remembering that there is safety in numbers, I join the flying squadron, and reach the house with the rest. As we enter by the side door, the rusty front-door bell is smartly pulled by a business-looking man in black, at whom we all peep privily from convenient lattices, and make up our minds that Providence sent him straight from heaven to be our deliverer. He has come to see papa, we ascertain later, and is even now closeted with him.

I wonder how he will manage to so far smooth his ruffled plumes as to carry on any conversation that is not strictly vituperative?

We are all sitting together, save Jack, when we hear his steps coming down the passage, and he enters and closes the door with a cheerful bang, that does not make us all bound on our seats as the bangs of a certain other person do. There is a peculiar look on Jack's face, a kind of knowing twinkle in his eye, a modest elation in his glance, that owes its origin, I am certain, to some bit of news that he has possessed himself of, and which he is secretly enjoying in its full relish before imparting it to us.

»News!« we all cry, starting from our seats, »surely he cannot—cannot be—going away?«

Oh! those two delicious words, can any others in the whole dictionary contain such sweet music?

»I say,« says Jack, vigorously repulsing the avalanche of female charms that threatens to overwhelm him, »I can't tell you anything, can I, if you stifle me?«

»Go on! go on!« we all cry, withdrawing hastily from the oracle.

»Well,« says Jack, complacently surveying the row of open eyes, mouths, and ears, »he is *going*

away (shouts of delight); he is going to-morrow (fresh rejoicings); and he is coming back next day (howls of dissatisfaction). Nevertheless, there is one assuaging circumstance, he is going early, so we shall have one clear day in which to accomplish our deeds of darkness.«

»Hurrah! I know what *I* shall do.«

»You'll take me with you,« I say imploringly, »do.«

»Can't,« says Jack briefly, »I shall go out shooting.«

We all gasp; Jack with a gun in his hands! Oh, if the governor could but——

»What are you going to shoot?« asks Alice with interest.

»Blackbirds.«

»Yourself, you mean,« I say, nodding and feeling much hurt, and somewhat spiteful that I may not go with him to see the fun. »Only if you do, you must do it thoroughly; the governor hates sickness, you know; and if you did have a bad accident, how you would catch it.«

»Funerals are expensive,« says Alice. »On the whole I think papa would rather he only crippled himself.«

»I shall take his new gun,« says Jack, pursuing

his own train of thought, and paying no heed to our cackle, »it's sure not to burst.«

»I shall make treacle tarts,« I say, feeling my abasement very keenly, and wondering if Jack will relent. (I could make myself useful in picking the birds up.)

»What are you going to do, Alice?«

»I don't know,« she says, turning a lovely, thoughtful face upon me, »there is so little mischief girls can get into. I think I shall make Amberley take me into Pimpernel, and I will have my photograph taken; it has never been done yet, you know.«

»Whatever do you want a likeness for?« asks Jack, opening his eyes; »can't you look at your face in the glass fifty times a day if you like? And there's nobody to give it to, for we haven't a friend in the world, and you wouldn't give one to *us* surely?«

But Alice does not answer, she is wondering what the sun will make of her face of which—

»'Tis beauty truly blent, whose red and white
Nature's own sweet and cunning hand laid on.«

»I shall go with Alice,« says Milly promptly.

»And I,« says Alan the solemn-faced, »shall look over papa's new edition of the 'Ingoldsby

Legends'; I've had one or two peeps at it already.«

»What are you going to do, Dolly?«

»I shall take two Seidlitz powders with sugar, you know. They are so nice, and nurse says they make me thinner. I am never able to take them when papa is at home, because they make me look pale.«

»Bravo, Dolly,« cries Jack, »happy the mind that a little contents. Well, girls, you shall have a fine dish of blackbirds for supper, and Nell's treacle tarts, if they are eatable.«

»*Will you?*« cries a terrible voice behind us, that galvanizes our recumbent forms into most intense and rigid uprightness, while every soft hair on our miserable young heads stands on end with freezing, curdling horror, »Will you? I'll teach *you*, miss (with a fierce nod at Alice's pretty trembling figure), to go gallivanting off to Pimpernel, to simper at a low photographer, you miserable, doll-faced, conceited puppet; (to Jack) I'll teach *you*, sir, to use my guns and bring me in a doctor's bill a yard long for mending your wretched bones; (to me) I'll teach *you*, you object, to waste my substance with your filthy treacle tarts; and you, sir, (to Alan) to maul over my books, while as to you, (to Dolly) although I can't offer you Seidlitz

powders, perhaps brimstone and treacle will do as well, oo—oo—oo—*ooh*. You deceitful, vagabond, shameless pack, get out of my sight; go!»

He need not tell us that twice, away we flee, every man for himself and devil take the hindmost; along the passage, up the stairs, in at the nursery, to which we always flee on these occasions, for mother is nearly always there. At our heels comes the governor, and a lively time follows; we become a prose version of that deplorable story of ten little niggers, which we all know; as rapidly as they dropped off, so do we: this one for a cane, that for a bible, another into space with boxed ears, until from beginning with a goodly number we end a forlorn remnant. Over and above our other punishments we are one and all sent to bed, and thither, when he has stormed himself away, we retire, only too thankful to have that refuge to sneak into. Anything is bearable while we are together, the only real misery he could inflict upon us would be to commit us all to solitary confinement. Jack comes in by-and-by, and sits down on the edge of Alice and Milly's bed, while I perch myself on a chair hard by.

»What fools we were,« he says, with a dark look in his blue eyes, »not to have set a scout to



watch the sneakiness of him; why couldn't he have walked in like a man, instead of hanging about outside?» He gives his shoulders, which are still tingling with the sharp lash of the governor's cane, an impatient shake.

»I can't think what fathers were invented for,« I say dolefully. »I am sure we should have got on much better without ours. For my part, if I had been asked whether I would or would not come into the world, I should have said, 'Yes, and thank you kindly, sir, if you can arrange for me to have no papa?'«

»And yet he almost forgives our daring to exist, when he reflects on the number of times we have afforded him the exquisite satisfaction of beating us,« says Jack. »Well, when I come back from school next Christmas, if he tries to beat the devil's tattoo on *my* back again, he shall find he won't get it all his own way.«

»And we will hang upon his coat tails,« I say, comfortingly, »while the fry harass him fore and aft in countless swarms.«

»Don't forget that he is going away,« puts in Milly; »I was turning that sweet thought over in my mind the whole time he was making that row.«

»He will lock us all up,« I say with conviction.

»He will never go away and leave us free to do all the things he heard us arranging to-night.«

»You little silly!« says Jack crushingly; »don't you know that he thinks us all *dummies*, and no more believes us capable of daring to do anything that he has forbidden than that the moon is made of green cheese? I shan't shoot to-morrow; I mean to do something *worse*.«

CHAPTER VI.

»Happy in this, she is not yet so old
But she may learn; and happier than this,
She is not bred so dull but she can learn.«

BREAKFAST is over, and the monotonous burden of our sins sung into our ears, from the saying of amen at prayers to the last drop in the governor's coffee cup, is over. It has been very bad, but in listening to his fulminations we have been let off the active misery of conversation; and on the whole, for we are very hardened sinners, we almost prefer the breakfast to our usual ones. He is standing in the hall now, brushing his hat, and the sound sends a thrill of delight through our bodies; we know the full import of it so well, though we hear it so much, much too rarely. Up the carriage drive comes the sharp trot of a horse's hoofs; it is the dog-cart that is going to take him to the station. Simpkins carries out his travelling bag (the old varlet is as pleased in his heart as we are, he too will get a little holiday), and we all go into the hall and make a frosty peck, one

by one, at the governor's face, occasionally hitting his nose or eyebrow by mistake. He eyes us keenly to see if he can detect any indecent joy upon our faces, but they are perfectly blank and stolid, to such abhorred hypocrisy have we already brought our innocent, indeterminate, pink-and-white features. He kisses mother (how droll it seems to see him making a peck at anybody!); and now he is in the dog-cart, he is starting, he is giving a sharp look at our assembled countenances, he is off, and has turned the corner of the drive. Still there is unbroken silence; then as the last sound of the wheels dies away in the distance, the delight that has been running riot within us, breaks forth in exclamation, laughter, leaps, dances, whoops, and (on my part at least) rolls of bliss. When they have subsided a little—»Children,« says mamma, »I have something to tell you.«

»Won't it keep, mamma dear?« asks Alice, »till some day when we are not quite so happy? We don't get many treats; had we not better have them one at a time?«

»It will keep,« says mamma, smiling; »but I shall tell you now. We are going away.«

Going away! We know the sound of these words well enough as applied to the governor, but

as applied to ourselves they have a strange, unusual flavour—a romantic freshness that breathes of distant lands, gorgeous cities, and unknown, mysterious pleasures. Not one of us have ever been away from home in all our lives, save Jack.

»Where, mamma?« we ask after a pause; it takes a little while to get used to the idea that we are going away, without requiring any further knowledge on the subject.

»To the sea!« The answer strikes us dumb again. Have we not longed ourselves sick for a sight of it? Have we not splashed ourselves from head to foot over a dirty pond in trying to make real waves with stout sticks?

»When, mamma, *when*?«

»Early next week. Your papa has heard of a house that will suit us.«

So soon! it takes our breath away. »And is he coming too?« I ask anxiously.

»Not for a fortnight.« We draw a deep sigh of satisfaction.

»What strolls we will have!« says Alice. »And donkey rides!« »and shrimps!« »and peace!« »and cuttle-fish toothpowder!« »No walks!« »or punishments!« »No one to call us dummies!« »or make us talk!« »or send us to bed!«

»Come along, Dolly,« says Alan the solemn-faced. »I'm going to begin packing up.«

Jack and I go out into the garden and discuss our plans—what beasts are to go with us, what to be left behind. Paul Pry must come, of course, and the raven, and the canaries, and Pepper, the tail-less. Dorley must take care of the rabbits; and as to the fowls, they have lately misbehaved themselves so perseveringly, that it would cause us no great sorrow if, on our return, we found papa had made a holocaust of the whole lot. Possibly the amazing news puts out of our heads our several intentions of evil-doing; at any rate we get into no mischief to-day, and merely walk about, laugh, talk, and stretch, not only in the school-room, but about the house, just as if we were used to doing it every day of our lives.

The governor comes back a trifle sweeter than he went. For once business does not seem to have rubbed him the wrong way; and somehow the few days slip away, and the golden morning of our departure arrives.

The coach stands at the door. It is going to take us all the way, and we are packed within it close as herrings, happy as lords; every nook and corner inside and out brimmingly full; where a

body is not squeezed in, a hamper or a parcel is, and how we shall ever be got out again is something of a mystery. We have smuggled all our little private belongings in safely. Under my petticoats lurk the birds and Paul Pry, who, with the sense of a Christian, utters not a sound, raps out not a single oath; a large basket of quarantine hides its modest head under mother's legs; the young ones firmly grasp spades and buckets as though they expected to find the sea upon the road; Amberley embraces five distinct bundles, bandboxes, and bags; the babies, set bolt up on end, utter fat little chirps of satisfaction. On the doorstep stands the governor, to whom we have just said good-bye with a freedom and affability that I think astonishes him as much as it does ourselves; for once in his presence our voices come honestly forth; for once we kiss him, and I at least feel that I *love* him. And now the last forgotten parasol is handed in, the last servant has climbed with many a creak to her place on the roof; the coachman cracks his whip. »Chirrup, chirrup,« go the canaries. »Hip, hip, hur-r-r-ah!« goes Paul Pry. »Bow-wow!« goes Pepper, wriggling her head out between Jack's legs.

»Oh!« says Dolly, with a deep sigh.

»Balmy!« I ejaculate, pushing my hat to the back of my head; and away we go, nodding and smiling, and saying good-bye! good-bye! to the little gentleman on the door-steps, who somehow looks quite insignificant and a little forlorn now that he is not the centre of a dozen duteous white slaves.«

»We are off!« says Alice.

»We are dreadfully hungry!« sigh Dolly and Allan, pointing their prophetic noses at a bulging hamper that obtrudes its portly body in an uncomfortable way between nurse and Balaam's Ass, the under nursemaid. It is only eight o'clock, and we had breakfast at seven, and it is rather early to be setting out; but when everybody is so anxious to start, so ready to go, why should there be any unnecessary tarrying? Yoicks! away we go, along the dewy, bloomy lanes, between the fresh, green hedgerows, with the early breath of the morning blowing coolly in on our happy, eager faces; past the staring, silent cows, and the dull labourers who, poor souls! are going about their work just as on any other day, who are not tasting our first delicious, strange draught of »going away!« We feel like pilgrims setting out for an unknown land; we do not know what is before us,

whether of sweet or sour; but that it will be something very different from anything we have ever known before we are perfectly certain, and that is enough for us. Jack pooh-poohs our transports, and pretends to have seen everything that we observe before, which is not right of him, for I know he goes to school in quite an opposite direction, and by train; whereas travelling by coach is a very different and far more knowledgeable thing.

We keep our eyes very widely open all the way, and observe with interest how the country changes as we near the coast, and how blue the cottage children's eyes are, as though a bit of the sea had got into them and stayed there. Happy folks are always hungry, and by ten o'clock we are clamouring to attack the hamper; at two we are dying of want and finish it up; at four we pounce upon the quarantines (which were to last us a week, Dorly said), and eat them all up, every one. We get rather fagged the latter part of the way; our bodies are stiff and tired, and we cannot stretch them. By degrees one voice ceases, then another; one of the babies cries; Paul Pry makes remarks that he should not before the children. We look very different to the noisy, bustling, smiling people who started a few hours ago.

By-and-by we are startled out of our apathy by a shout without of »The sea! the sea!« and we leap up to the sight of a broad, boundless expanse of deepest, darkest blue, that thrills us through and through, and holds us spell-bound with a breathless delight and strong awe. How our souls seem drawn towards it, though our bodies remain in the coach! Presently (I do not know how it happens), we are standing before it, gazing almost deliriously at the glittering, belted-in treasure. When the first shock is over, how we stretch out our arms to it, as though we would clasp its beauty in our embrace! How we stoop, and dabble our fingers in the strange, salt liquid! How we stand watching the waves lapping softly over each other with no fuss or hurry, or effort, rather as though they were in play not earnest, but, as we quickly find, impelled by an on-coming strength that makes the babyish ripples resistless as fate, inexorable as death! We gather trails of brown seaweed, and when our hands are full, cast them away for others. We are distracted by the abundant riches of the feast set out before us; something new, unimagined, and wonderful meets our eyes at every step. Into my heart comes a dim ache that is not keen pleasure or satiety, but a passionate regret that

my soul is not bigger, grander, capable of holding more of the great tide of rapture that sweeps through me in such a mighty flood. When Amberley comes for us I turn away as one in a dream; from a long way off I seem to hear her exclamation at our condition; though indeed I am well aware that we are as forlorn, dirty, dripping little wretches as any to be found in the kingdom, all save Alice, over whom untidiness and dirt hold no power.

As we go inland my senses seem to come back to me, and I hail with delight the jolly, red-brick face of our new abode, which appears to smile jovially upon us and bid us kindly welcome. Inside it is in a most immoral, delicious state of topsyturvydom—luggage, servants, children, and animals, all mixed up in most admired disorder; babies crying, small fry falling downstairs, servants rifling half-filled boxes, canaries shrieking for water and groundsel, Paul Pry cursing his fate with peculiar bitterness and intensity from his perch on Minerva's head, to which he has evidently betaken himself for safety. It is a fine hurly-burly, and if papa could only walk in and see it all, his appearance would put the finishing stroke to the scene, and make it Bedlam.

We sit down to a nondescript meal, but can scarcely eat for talking. A thousand tongues would not express the half that we feel; and oh! how bald the words are that language provides for expressing a great delight. Deeply impressed as Jack is, he can find no words whereby to convey his admiration of the ocean than by those of »jolly« and »stunning«.

It is too late to go out again this evening, so we go to bed, that we may be able to rise with the first streak of daylight on the morrow. Sleep binds me so safely though, that on Jack's calling me, I am scandalized to find it as late as six. What a lot of time we have wasted already!

In half an hour we are out on the beach and among the rocks, making queer discoveries; for instance, that shrimps and crabs do not grow scarlet but drab; also that the saying, »stick like a limpet«, has a sound, healthy truth of its own that many proverbs have not; also that the seaweed-covered rocks have a remarkable knack of slipping away from our feet, compelling us to turn somersaults more rapid than elegant. We hunt for and find delicate shells, curious rose-hued freaks of Neptune, and we muse over them, marvelling in what sea palace the carver lurks who casts up to us such

dainty and mysterious shapes. We hold the bigger ones to our ears, and listen intently to the faint murmur that must, we think, so exactly represent the shoaling noise the sea makes at a great distance. We have listened to the same murmur before at Silverbridge, and nurse always told us it was the sea that we heard.

After breakfast we accompany Amberley and our sisters in a sober trot through the one long street that forms the town of Periwinkle, and sit down on the shingle where, apparently, the beauty and fashion (!) of the place do congregate, for no other purpose than to watch the rows of fat and lean kine who are taking their daily dip in the sea hard by, bobbing up and down in the sun like seals, with snaky locks of hair clinging round their cheeks, and tight, sticky bathing-gowns that most lavishly display their charms, or the lack of them.

Jack and I have a hot dispute as to whether a very fat woman or a very lean one looks worst in the water. *I* say the former, *he* says the latter, and implores me on no account to submit my person to the public gaze without at least six thick bathing-gowns put on, like an old clothesman's hats, one above the other.

They are a gruesome spectacle, these fat matrons and lean old maids; even the young girls, who might be good-looking if their faces were dry, have an unsavoury appearance, for salt water seems to have an ugly knack of washing out shams, stripping off borrowed charms, and leaving the original visage clear and visible. Aphrodite herself must have found it rather a hard matter to look as handsome under the circumstances as she did. It must be on the principle that there is always something pleasing to us in the misfortunes of our friends that makes these people flock to see their acquaintances *au naturel*, sans crinoline, sans bustle, sans pads, sans everything, save their own unembellished bodies and countenances. I wish the performers would go through their paces with a little more vigour and spirit, take a good sousing header into space, and look as if they liked it, instead of taking a dip as though they were going to be hanged; coming up, not smiling, but with shut eyes and screwed-up nose and mouth, sputtering, coughing, gasping, groaning, and holding on to the rope as though they were being shipwrecked. Others do not go so far as the heroism of dipping; they hug the shore and sit basely down on the sand, letting the water ripple

over them by degrees. For decency's sake one could wish the process were less gradual. Others again shiver on the steps of the machine, and are afraid to venture in at all.

Now and then a daring young woman creates enormous excitement by lowering herself carefully into the water, and bringing her pink toes to the surface in the first position, stares up unwinkingly at Father Sol. Gallant creature! the pint or so of salt water that she swallows is but a slight set-off against the glory she achieves, and the admiration her prowess evokes from the lookers-on.

Jack and I soon weary of looking at this raree-show; and having promised Amberley not to drown ourselves, not to get into a boat without a boatman and with a large hole in the bottom, not to sit upon a rock until the tide surrounds and flows over us, not to climb to the highest pinnacle of the cliff with the express intention of toppling over it to the rocks below, we take our departure, and speed the morning hours well enough.

Oh! the sea is a rare playfellow, for, unlike many a human one, he never wearies you! Each day he wears some new aspect, compels from us fresh wonder, admiration, and fear. He is terrible in his angry splendour of wind-tossed, thundering

breakers, when his surface is all deep-green valleys, and towering, snowy-crested mountain tops. He is soft, tender, caressing as a summer breeze, with his shoaling, rippling murmur, and lazy, creeping wavelets. Sometimes he is sulky, not angry, that is when the sun has hidden his face; then he catches the reflection of the sky and is sad-coloured and dull. Another day he will lie calm as a lake, like a great monster soundly asleep, and we do not love his monotonous peace; dearer far is he to us when he stirs and flushes and quivers in the sun, his kingly breast sown with millions upon millions of sparkling diamonds. He gives no sign of the dark secrets he hides away so deep, so deep; of the water-slain bodies that lie below with the swish! swish! of his green waters, swirling over their pale, drowned faces, of the souls that trusted themselves to his smiling mien and silvern whispers, and whom he has drawn down, down! to the sea-chambers, of whose treasures we can but dimly guess from the rainbow-tinted shells and bloomy seaweed that are now and again washed up to us from their depths.

Has not the sea its cities and towns and gardens and dwelling-houses? Do not flowers as lovely, as glowing, as fragrant grow in those silent

gardens as any the dry land affords? They must have rare jewels down there; pearls such as no mortal empress ever wore; precious stones, common as pebbles on the shore; rare and costly gewgaws, plentiful as the sand, with goodly store of gold and silver, rifled from the gallant ships laden with splendid store of merchandize brought from foreign lands. Oh! it must be a rich land, and might be a fair land, if that great and countless army of the dead did not claim it so urgently for its own.

We have not been in Periwinkle a week; we have not learned one-half his moods, one-half his secrets, when something happens—something that sends me shuddering away from him inland, and makes me hate the sound of his voice and the dazzle of his brow.

Jack and I are standing on the beach one morning, watching a haul of mackerel in. The men have been pulling for hours. »It is strangely heavy,« they mutter; »the net will break;« but by-and-by it comes safely in, and we all gather round to where it lies on the edge of the sand, with the waves rippling gently up to it. At first I see nothing but a glittering, brilliant, opal-tinted mass of glistening fish, which sparkle and scintillate in the sun, as they leap to and fro in their restless, un-

known agony; then I make out a strange, dark, shapeless mass beneath them, that is—what? A dead man, with horribly discoloured face and wide, staring eyes, looking out with dull and awful meaning from among the quivering, leaping fish for which the net was cast, and which has brought in *this*. A woman thrusts her way through the crowd, and falls on her knees beside the net. »*My lad!*« she says, »*my lad!*« . . . He went out alone in his boat a week ago, and did not return; but she said she knew he would come back, and she has been watching for him night and day.

»Come away,« I say to Jack dizzily; and we go away, away inland, and it is many a long day before I love the treacherous sea again and can forget.

We do not see much of Alice and Milly, who prefer the town and the shingle to the rocks and the caves; and it sometimes strikes Jack and me as odd that, when we *do* come across our sisters, all the black, grey, and blue coats belonging to the youth abiding in, and sojourning at, Periwinkle should be in their immediate neighbourhood. But then Alice is so lovely; who can help liking to look at her? The very girls turn and stare at her with that grudging, unwilling, breathless interest

that I am already learning to know is the highest compliment one woman can pay another, and which I shall never, *never* wring from any of my own sex. I may even fall to the degradation of being called »nice looking« by them.

Alice looks demure as a nun; and how can the pretty soul help it if rude men *will* stare at and follow her about? All I know is I love to look at what is pleasant to the eye; and if I had been born comely should have carried about a pocket-mirror with me, and refreshed my eyes with a sight of my charms every five minutes, while nobody would ever have admired me half as heartily and appreciatingly as I should have admired myself.

CHAPTER VII.

»Some there be that shadows kiss
Such have but a shadow's bliss:
There be fools alive, I wis.«

It is nine o'clock, and I am making my toilette for the night, and smiling to myself at a ridiculous story Jack told me just now about an old sailor down here. He would like to be devout but has not time to save his soul, so has copied out the longest and finest prayer he knows of, and pinned it over his bedstead, and every night and morning, when he turns in and turns out, he looks towards it and says, »' *Thim's* my sintiments, O Lord!« I have time, plenty, so there is no fear of my following his example. As I take a last look out of the window preparatory to jumping into bed, my attention is arrested by the extraordinary appearance presented by the hedge that lies on the other side of the road, which appears to be animated with what might be a row of uneven trees swaying to and fro, if, on this stirless night, there were wind enough to stir anything.

It is growing dark, and in the uncertain light it is difficult to pronounce distinctly on the phenomena; but I, nevertheless, come to the conclusion that the bobbing objects are hats, hats which may be reasonably supposed to have human beings inside them. Burglars! I say to myself promptly, and descend to Jack's room, which overlooks the back garden, not the front. He is not in bed, so returns with me, and surveying the enemy with some interest, squashes my theory by saying, »Burglars! Why, you little sawney, burglars hide, they don't hop up and down like Jacks-in-the-box; besides, there are too many of 'em!«

All at once a light breaks in upon me. I have surreptitiously read two or three words which have given me some small insight into the imbecile practices of courtships, and now I am able to put two and two together, while Jack, poor lad, is completely at sea.

»I know!« I say, nodding my head violently, »I know! it's *lovers*!«

»Lovers!« repeats Jack, quite unimpressed, and in a most scornfully contemptuous voice; »how exactly like a girl with her silly notions! Who do you suppose they'd come after, miss; *you*?«

»No; but there is Tabitha, you know, and

Balaam's Ass« (Balaam's Ass is our under nursemaid, whose obstinacy is so incurable, that years ago we gave her the above name, which has stuck to her).

»Very likely either of them would get a lover, is it not?« asks Jack, peering about. »Perhaps you would not mind *cook's* having a chance?«

»It may be cook,« I say, brightening up; »I heard James call her 'an old flirt' the other day, and she was so pleased.«

»I should say it *was* cook,« says Jack, grinning, »for one man would not be of much use in that quarter; perhaps if they all stood in a circle they might be able to clasp her charms. No, it's not cook, it's somebody or other in the school-room under, for I just saw one beast deliberately kiss his hand towards it. I'm going down to see who is there.«

»Wait a minute for me,« I say, furling an Elijah-like mantle around me, and so equipped, go down the stairs with him. We go into the school-room, but there is nothing there; nothing, that is to say, but Alice and Milly, who are sitting by the window in their white gowns. We retire and walk slowly upstairs; half-way Jack stops short and looks at me. »It's not cook,« he says, de-

liberately, »and it's not Tabitha, nor Balaam's Ass, it's *Alice*.«

Alice! I stand staring at him. »Are you mad?« I ask at last.

»No,« he says, walking on, »but I'm disgusted. To think that those impudent——« the remainder of his speech is lost in a mutter. He is very young, but he has in him the germ of that dislike (so tenacious in the breasts of all Englishmen) that every brother, husband, or father has, to having his womankind looked upon too familiarly or too nearly by any stranger.

»What a row there will be when papa comes!« I say, drawing a deep breath.

»Serve her right too,« says Jack, as he vanishes into his bed-room, and I retire to bed with a troubled mind and a resolve to give my pretty sister a friendly warning to-morrow. Finding my opportunity, I put my arm round her neck, and, looking into her fresh face, that is not, I hope,

»A violet in the youth of primy nature;
Forward, not permanent; sweet, not lasting;
The perfume and suppliance of a minute,
No more,«

say, »If I were you I would not have quite so—so many, dear; there will be such a row when papa

comes!« Alice laughs, blushes, and is about to answer when mother comes in, and no more is said.

We go out donkey riding this afternoon, everybody except Jack, who is too proud. A small drove of asses has been chartered for the occasion, and at the appointed hour they stand at the door, meek and stubborn, each provided with a small boy, whose duty it is to »whip up« the aforesaid beast and make it »go«. Amberley's charger staggers ominously as she mounts him; and, when seated, her long legs touch the ground, but she would rather die than be left behind, or prove unequal to the emergency; so she hitches them up, and leads the van with some dignity, and, I think, much discomfort. Alice has the best beast; it has a broad back and a fat body, and she sits on it at her ease, shaded by her cool straw hat, under which her face takes no yellow reflections as does mine, looking as the queen of Sheba may have looked in her young and palmy days. Mother has insisted on our taking two or three of the fry, strong-backed, stout-limbed boys, of whom there is an endless succession after Dolly, so we make a goodly cavalcade as we jog away with our attendant *gamins*.

Now there are few things pleasanter than to

idle along the Devonshire lanes in summer-time on a well-grown, broad-backed, peaceable donkey; one is not at the trouble of walking, nor yet at the trouble of riding; one can just amble along at leisure, enjoying the air, the sky, and the light that quivers on the path through boughs that meet coolly overhead. There is a dreamy sensation of utter rest as one wanders in and out of the tangle of lanes that seem to have no beginning and no ending, but to indulge this feeling, the boy with the stick, whose whacks, regular as the flail on a threshing-floor, fall upon your animal's hide, must be left behind: there is little romance in these darkly shaded, flower-starred lanes to the tune of such music. We have a few mishaps by the way. Amberley is painfully thin, so is her beast, and their bones do not agree; so every now and then she slips noiselessly over his head, and glides into the ditch or dusty road. We get used to it after a bit, so does she, and takes it as a matter of course. Dolly's steed walks into a turnstile and is with some difficulty disentangled. The fry have, to our great relief, long ago succeeded in goading their asses into a trot, and have vanished amid clouds of dust, closely followed by their attendant sprites, yelling with delight at the spirit their several

J

∞

∞

[]

[]

[]

protégés evince. At Alice's request our party of beaters have fallen behind, so we pace silently along the dim green lanes, meeting neither man nor horse; it is all as hushed, as still and as solitary, as an uninhabited island.

Lothfully we turn homeward at last, and are met at the house door by mother with the intelligence that the governor is coming to-morrow. Our jocund laughter ceases, we all dismount anyhow, and go indoors to sit down under the shock of the intelligence which (though we know it must arrive some time or other) comes upon us like an ice-cold shower-bath. We all seem to have forgotten our days of bondage during this past fortnight. Farewell, *dolce-far-niente* days. We did not make half enough of you while you lasted; and now you are gone, and we shall never get any at all like you again. Farewell, social breakfasts, leisurely dinners, pleasant strolls, and general ease of body and soul! Farewell, donkeys, crabs, shrimps, rocks, seaweed, early walks, and natural conversation.

Now that those happy days are gone, I become aware that Jack and I did not *half* fill them. We might have got into so much more mischief, done so many more things, enjoyed ourselves twice as keenly. How shall we ever pull ourselves together

by to-morrow? Morally speaking, we have fallen to pieces during the last fourteen days, but all that must be seen to at once. We must put on our stays, gird up our loins, and look sharply to our manners, morals, and clothes; the very expression of our faces must be altered, and our voices be brought down a great many notes. We must get out of that loose and ridiculous habit of laughing at everything and nothing; we must smooth the gay smiles out of our faces, and he or she who has any dimples must put them away for the present. The school-room must be set in order and some school books laid about to look as though they had been used, the dining-room must be polished till it winks again; James must be awakened from the sloth into which he has fallen, and the cook stirred up to punctuality; the fry must be promptly broken of the habit they have lately fallen into of tumbling down and cutting open their heads, noses, or legs; in short, the whole house and all that dwell therein must be thoroughly revised, weeded, and drilled against the ordeal of that awful to-morrow that is rushing upon us as fast as it can pelt. It does not seem half-an-hour ago that mother told us the news, and, lo! the night has passed away, the morning has come and

gone, one o'clock has struck, and in the distance we hear the smart trot of horses' feet, and we know that behind that cheerful trot sits our uncheerful governor.

We are drawn up in well-brushed, well-scrubbed, solemn-faced ranks in the school-room. There is not one vagabond smile among the whole lot. And now he is in the hall, he is kissing mother, and in another minute stands before us. Why can I not infuse into my salute that warmth and alacrity that I did on wishing him good-bye on the Manor House door-step? Why, indeed! As we pass in review before him, he looks at each from head to foot; but we all pass muster safely until he comes to the last of all, Alice. We know what is coming when his eye lights on a certain portion of that young woman's dress—nothing more or less, in short, than a crinoline row. The fact is Alice loves a big crinoline; papa, accustomed to the straight up and down charms of *his* mother and grandmother, hates it; and as sure as ever her petticoats swell beyond a certain limit there is a fearful to do, and the whole house is turned upside down and out of windows. Now, Alice knows the length of tether permitted to her perfectly well, but she is under a mistaken impression that the more

balloon-like her skirts, the more charming her pretty form appears; and when she wants to look particularly ravishing, puts on a little more crinoline, just as a South Sea islander puts on a little more paint; and in the excitement and novelty of the Periwinkle life, she has forgotten her parent's little prejudices, and stands before him confessed in all her amplitude of five yards and a half.

It is odd that she should be caught though, for her crinoline is like some magical flower that opens and shuts, expands and contracts, according to the state of the weather, *i. e.* papa's temper. If he is in an amiable or engrossed mood, she usually lets out an extra reef or two; if he is in a bad one, she collapses at a moment's notice and looks like a folded butterfly; but Alice's admirers have evidently turned her ideas topsy-turvy.

»You disgusting spectacle!« says papa, deliberately looking at her from top to toe, »you object! Go to your room and take that vile barrel off, and if you ever dare appear before me in it again, I'll pull it off and burn it.«

Off goes Alice, whisking a pile of books from the table in her passage to the door; she does not mean to do it, poor pretty Alice, it is only an evil trick played her by that fatal combination of

whalebone and calico, but the governor thinks she does, and flies after her. Thank God, she is too old to have her ears boxed, and he soon returns; but, oh! we heartily wish we had no ears at all, as we sit for half an hour listening to his tirade against Alice, mother, Amberley, and his own evil fate in marrying to become the father of such a daughter. (It was the best thing he ever did in his life.)

CHAPTER VIII.

»If she be made of red and white,
Her faults will ne'er be known,
For blushing cheeks by faults are bred,
And fears by pale white shown.«

THE clock is striking eight, and we are all hunting *ventre-à-terre* for the family book of prayers. Not once since we came to Periwinkle have we looked upon its godly face, and now it is revenging itself by refusing to come forth and save us from utter disgrace. If papa discovers that we have eaten our morning meal without the seasoning salt of chapter, prayer, and benediction, then woe, woe, woe betide us! We distractedly turn the books over and over, but *nowhere* does that much coveted old brown cover meet our eager gaze. Overhead we hear his warlike tread as he walks to the toilet table; he is putting on his coat, now he has opened the door, and is telling mamma she is the laziest woman in Christendom, and a disgrace to her sex; his foot is on the stair, oh!—o—o—oh! We tumble madly over each other in a dancing agony, and a

pale tear trickles down Amberley's nose, when, hallelujah! I have found it, wedged in with its back to the wall, between the »Arabian Nights« and the »Pilgrim's Progress«. We are saved by the skin of our teeth, and fly to our seats with thankful hearts while Alice finds the place, and sets the old marker, »Jesus wept«, with its back broken in three places, on the open page. He is in the room before she has done, and having received our morning salutes, and glanced sharply at Alice's collapsed charms (she looks like Samson shorn of his strenght), rings the bell for prayers. He is half through the chapter before the servants can get in at the door; but that is of little consequence, they would not hear a word if they were present. Breakfast passes over better than might be expected. There are so many safe remarks we can make about Periwinkle; every man and woman we see is not an enemy, the mention of whose name must be shunned as the plague; and I am even able to provoke a smile by remarking that it is difficult to hear the sermon on Sunday evenings because the sailors snore so loudly.

I think that if we were to travel much we should find plenty to talk to him about; become quite colloquial in fact. Ah! travel's a wonderful

thing for enlarging the mind. No wonder splendid Will said, »Home keeping youths have ever homely wits,« (of course he meant that for girls as well.)

After breakfast our troubles begin. We go for a walk, and make the depressing discovery that in every deep there is a lower depth, and that, bad as the Silverbridge walks were, the Periwinkle ones are infinitely, unmeasurably worse.

The governor is apparently as impervious to shingle as to ploughed fields, for he leads the van without a falter, while we flounder, slip, and stumble after him like a badly drilled squad of infantry. The sun is fiercely smiting our backs, blistering our cheeks and noses, making us feel that our bodies have suddenly grown gross and heavy and suffocating; our clothes might be of woollen, so irritatingly do they chafe us. It is one of those broiling mornings when existence under a green tree is bad enough, but existence taking a race over a glaring shingle is diabolical.

We are bound for the rocks now uncovered by the receding tide, and over them we are going to Cod's Bay, a fishing village of evil reputation and bad smells, that hides its dirty head round the corner of the cliff. It seems near enough, but, judged by the endless succession of slippery

boulders that intervene, we find it a very long way indeed, and groan in our spirits as we slide and scramble after our leader, who bounds on in front, agile as a chamois, and twice as sure-footed as his progeny. Not one cropper does he come; but Amberley makes up for him; she slides majestically down the rocks as though born to the accomplishment, and even *sits* in the pools among the scurrying little crabs, from whence she has to be fished out by our united efforts. She makes no complaint though, far from it; her bruised shins, damaged elbows, and wet petticoats all come in the day's work.

We reach Cod's Bay at last, looking as though we had fallen among thieves, and take our way through its one unsavoury street, and climb a hill that would be trying in mid-winter, but in these dog-days is simply brutal. In two hours' time we get home, blowsy, footsore, and worn out, knowing that our evil days have indeed begun. Somehow the hours go by and blessed night-fall comes.

At the present moment I am standing with my hands behind my back, affectionately regarding a crab, garnished with frequent prawns and abundant bread and butter, which Jack and I have provided for supper, as a set-off against the disagreeables

of the day. He has gone to fetch a jug of cider, when he comes back we shall fall to. I walk to the open window and look out. The dim grey of night is creeping over the land; the cold, salt smell of the sea blows faintly but most freshly up across the town; the lights yonder look like coarse reflections of the bright, restless lamps that quiver and burn in the pale vault overhead. I lean my elbows on the window-sill, and look across at the rose garden, that, like many another in Devonshire, is on the other side of the road, and from whence a fragrant whiff comes now and again, and make a disastrous discovery. Those moving shadows yonder, what are they? Followers! Not one or two or three, but *dozens!* Oh, Alice, Alice! do I not know well enough what will happen? In five minutes the governor will come in from the garden at the back of the house, and sit down to supper (his seat faces the road and the hedge to the left of the rose garden), he will see them—he will rush out—and here conjecture fails me.

Jack enters, bearing the cider. »Jack!« I cry, rushing at him, »they have come, they are *here*, dozens of them!«

»Beetles?« asks Jack abstractedly, his thoughts

plainly running on the crab who is waiting to have his body dissected.

»Lovers!« I say, shaking him by the arm, »oh! what *shall* we do?«

Jack goes to the window. Below we hear the scraping of chairs, the rattle of plates; the lamplight streams across the road; evidently Alice is in full view of the enamoured host, for there is a sudden movement in their ranks, and they increase their capers tenfold, much as you may see Chucky, the pig, curl his tail and grunt excitedly when he sees a delectable wash approaching.

»If they would only keep quiet,« I say in despair, »perhaps he would not see them. Do you think they *know* what a dreadful man he is?« Jack vanishes. A thought strikes me; seizing my nightcap, I lean out of the window and wave it energetically, pointing first to the room below, then at the town yonder. Surely, surely, my nightcap says, as plain as it can speak, »Go away?« Alas! to them such is evidently not its meaning, for at sight of my modest signal, at the dim vision of my white-robed form, the besieging army seems inspired with fresh vigour, and even begins to clamber over the hedge. My flag of danger is construed as an amatory signal pointing to indef-

inite favours, perhaps a love-letter. In another moment I hear a chair pushed sharply back below; the next I see the governor tearing across the road. He is up the hedge and over it before you could say Jack Robinson; but, quick as he is, Miss Alice's admirers are quicker, and he shortly returns furious and empty handed. I am so petrified at the catastrophe my well-meaning efforts have brought about, that I am utterly incapable of moving away, so when the governor returns, and casts his eye over the house in search of the waiting-maid to whom he attributes the ovation, he beholds *me*—nightgown, nightcap, open mouth, and all. He shakes his fist wildly at me, and the gesture breaks the spell. I turn to hide myself in bed, but before I can reach it the governor is before me. I receive a box on the ear, that makes me see two enraged parents, two crabs, two jugs of cider, two nightcaps; then, with a thunderstorm of abuse and wrath bellowing about me, I am hustled out of the room, down into Jack's—a narrow slip of a place overlooking the back garden, and which is only—oh, horror! —partitioned off the governor's chamber. There I am left crabless, supperless, tearless, to reflect on the extreme folly of ever meddling in other people's affairs; no matter

what one's intentions may be, since the better they are the worse the results seem to be. Alice comes by-and-by, bringing me supper and comfort, as well she may, since her sins have brought down upon me the sentence of a three days' imprisonment to the house. Finally, for I shall have plenty of time for reflecting on my woes, I fall asleep. I scarcely seem to have reached the land of Nod, when I wake suddenly and open my eyes widely on—what? At first I am divided between a doubt whether it is papa come to finish me off, or that I am at last face to face with a ghost; it is so difficult to make out anything in this half-light (for the green window blinds are very thick and dark), and it cannot yet be more than very early morning. Do ghosts seize you by the arm and shake you till your teeth rattle in your head, and the breath is nearly out of your body? Do ghosts——

»It's four o'clock,« says a voice in a harsh whisper; »wake up, master Jack, wake up.«

»Master Jack!« *James!* I disappear under the bed-clothes like a shot; but if I think I am going to be left there in peace, I am much mistaken. To leave Master Jack snoring in bed when (I now remember) James has received particular injunctions over night to eject the same, however unwilling,

is no part of his duty, so he punches and prods my prostrate body with a most laudable vigour, making violent efforts to dispossess me of the clothes. To these, however, I cling like grim death, wrapping them about me as tightly as a hedgehog in his skin, and for a space there is a desperate tussle, intensely ludicrous by reason of its silence, for neither of us dare to make a sound for fear of the governor's hearing; finally, altogether worsted and confounded, he goes, and I am left to sit up in bed like Marius among the ruins of Carthage. Presently Jack's head is popped gingerly in at the door, and he stares a good deal at the sight of the tossed bed, my tangled locks, and flushed, indignant countenance.

»Has the governor been taking a turn at you?« he asks in a whisper.

»No,« I answer solemnly, »*Feames*. I am black and blue. He thought it was you, you know.«

»Oh, he did, did he?« asks Jack, sitting down on a chair and going off into a noiseless explosion, »I quite forgot to tell him——« He rocks himself to and fro in an agony of mirth. »*I* know what *his* awakings are.«

»And so do I,« I put in with conviction. »I'm sure they are nothing to laugh at.«

»I must go,« says Jack indistinctly, »or I shall burst;« and he goes away on some unlawful excursion or another that I should have loved, leaving me to moisten my sheets with unavailing tears. How slowly the hours creep by; how shall I ever get through three whole days? For once in my life I enjoy the honour of lying in my bed while the others are all scurrying down to prayers. I eat my breakfast in a slatternly way with a book before me, I dawdle through the morning reading Shakespeare, for oh, blessed oversight! papa forgot to set me any tasks. I pass my afternoon in imaginary conversation with two blackbirds and a linnet, enjoying with a certain complacency the knowledge that all the others, Jack included, are expiating *their* sins in the burning sun at the governor's heels, over shingle rock and sand. But by the time night falls I am heartily *sick* of my own society. I am longing to be in the midst of the chaff and noise and bustle of my brothers and sisters. If papa wants a recipe for making me ripe for Bedlam, he has only to shut me up alone for a fortnight. Somehow the days drag away and I am released, free to go down the stairs or up

as my spirit wills. Below I find things very crooked indeed; *he* is in a state of chronic ill-temper. Alice looks alarmed; she is red one moment, pale the next; and the very day of my re-admittance to the family bosom, disaster marks us for her own. We are awaiting the announcement of dinner, and the governor is looking out of the window, prepared to quarrel with anything, from the thrush singing yonder to the baker's boy with the bread, when a smart dog-cart drives slowly past, in which are seated two graceless, handsome, wide-awake Oxonians, who stare deliberately in at every window in search of Alice's blooming face. Papa turns round, and I think he is *black*, he can put two and two together as well as any other man, and he *knows*.

»Go to your room, miss,« he says to Alice. »So *this* is the care you take of my daughters?« he asks Amberley.

Poor Alice! poorer Amberley, poorest mother! We have one of our extra, double-distilled, most virulent rows. It is not worth writing down; no one would believe it if I did. Let it suffice that out of all the windy talk and abuse, one abiding resolve remains, Miss Alice will go to school immediately, and a stronger, firmer hand than

Amberley's shall be paid to crush the naughtiness out of her. The governor, as I have more than once remarked, is a man of action, and in an incredibly short space of time he has found a school and schoolmistress after his own heart and pattern. All preliminaries are arranged, the day for her departure is fixed, and to us all there is nothing left to do but to lament. All too soon the day and hour come round, and we crowd about her with our kisses and farewells; weeping in every degree, deeply and bitterly, loudly and effusively, silently and painfully, each according to our several natures; every one down to the babies furnishing his or her quota to the stream. »Good-bye, lovely sister, good-bye.« For how many weary, long months shall we see your sweet face no more?

CHAPTER IX.

«Love is a familiar, love is a devil; there is no evil angel but love. Yet Samson was so tempted, and he had an excellent strength; yet was Solomon so seduced, and he had a very good wit.»

IT was a year ago that I waved my nightcap out of the window at Alice's lovers; she has left school altogether now, and is home for good. She has been the terror of her schoolmistress, the admiration of her schoolmates, the delight of her pastors, masters, and every pair of male eyes that have lit upon her, in the straight and narrow precincts of her sheltered, quiet life; and now she has come back to us lovelier, waywarder, more bewitching than ever. Strictly speaking, we are not at home; we are at St. Swithins, whither papa, having no very pleasant memory of Periwinkle, has brought us for the holidays, and for the setting up of mother's health, which of late has been indifferent.

St. Swithins is a long, long way from Silver-bridge, and the governor's doughty reputation, not having spread so far, the residents of the place

actually *call* upon us (Oh! it makes me smile to think of it.) quite comfortably, and as a matter of course, without the slightest notion of the danger they are running, and *he*, in the most baffling and unaccountable manner, not only forbears to shout »Not at home!« in their faces, or hold the door wide open for them to walk out, but permits mother to return these visits; and though he never goes out himself, does not forbid her partaking of the very mild and temperate amusements offered—croquet, five o'clock tea, and the like. With mother goes Alice, who has, I think, high jinks. Whether papa is tired of living like Diogenes in his tub, or whether he finds it a new sensation to be treated just like any other man, I know not; at any rate a change has come »o'er the spirit of *his* dream«, and it is positively refreshing to see him sinking the misanthrope in the moderately ill-tempered, retiring English gentleman. If he goes on at this rate he will be quite convivial by the time he is sixty, and excellent company at seventy; while at eighty years he will be so jovial, that he will be quite sorry to have to go away; he will be beginning to enjoy life so much. (Happy thought! why did not he begin *earlier*?) It was only yesterday I saw him shake hands and walk

down the street with old Mr. Tempest, who has, it appears, a place near Silverbridge; but as the latter has never lived there within the memory of man, papa has had no chance of falling out with him. As it is, he is probably saving up the old gentleman as a *bonne bouche* to demolish at some future day. Mr. Tempest is an invalid who spends his life in wandering about the world in search of health, thus he has chanced on St. Swithins, which is by the faculty considered salubrious. He has a son, tall, straight, yellow-haired, with brave blue eyes that might belong to us Adairs. He looks nice, but neither Jack nor I have ever spoken to him yet.

St. Swithins is a dull little place, but none the less does that pretty young woman, Miss Alice, in all the pomp of her seventeen-year-old, pink-and-white beauty quickly gather about her as fine an army as she did at Periwinkle. She was only a bit of a girl then, she is grown up now, so there are no more unseemly scimmages of admirers behind hedges, or flying columns on the beach; things are conducted respectably, and it is no longer a question of a kiss of the hand or a love-letter, but of love and marriage. Yes, love and marriage; and if we don't look very sharp after

our Alice she will be carried off by somebody or other, to a dead certainty. Over and above half a dozen indiscriminate lovers, she has a shadow, a tall, bronzed, dark-faced, handsome shadow, that every young woman in St. Swithins has vainly tried to make her own. Captain Lovelace, however, has his own ideas about female beauty, and until his eyes lit on our sister's fresh, saucy, charming face he has never felt inclined to lose his own identity; but now—one, two, three, and away!—head over heels into love he falls, and Alice follows at a respectful distance. There have been some half-dozen public meetings, one stolen one, a rose given and exchanged, eager words spoken, a proposal made and answered, a kiss or two (who knows?), and Alice, with a promptitude that does her credit, has made up her mind that she loves him; that she will marry him; and that, if papa does not see things in the same light as she does, he must be brought to reason.

Young people are very intolerant, very daring; they defy circumstance, and would rule the world in their own way, and in return receive many a hard knock before learning the inevitable lesson of giving in. So, one fine morning, when the governor is unsuspectingly swearing over the weekly bills

in the library, Captain Lovelace is announced, and with a pluck that does him infinite credit, requests the honour of Miss Alice Adair's hand in marriage. (We are all listening at the door, Alice in the post of honour at the key-hole, the rest of us spread out behind her, anxiously looking forward to the excitement of seeing the bold wooer shoot out through the open door with considerable assistance from behind.) We can almost *hear* papa's gasp of amazement as he sits in the midst of his disordered papers (he usually dances on bills), and stares at the young man; then he pulls himself together and refuses the proposed honour with a clearness and brevity that admit of no mistake. He has however met his match for once.

Captain Lovelace hears him out, then quietly remarks that, having obtained Miss Adair's promise, he is content to wait to time for the fulfilment of his wishes, and is sure that, although Colonel Adair may refuse to give his consent now, he will do so at no very distant date. Papa gasps again; but I think an unpleasant recollection of his daughter's wilfulness crosses his mind, and in his next speech, although he still repudiates the wooer's pretensions, there is more bluster and less determination than in the first, and oh!—miracle of miracles!—he has

not yet tried to kick him! After that the deluge; and it would not astonish us if the governor suddenly fell on the young man's neck and kissed him, and, sending for Alice, wept holy tears over them both, saying, »Bless you, my children!«

Captain Lovelace is speaking. He is asking what reasons Colonel Adair has to give for this summary refusal? Can any exception be taken to his character, means, or position? Has Colonel Adair other views for his daughter? No; he has none, and he knows nothing to the detriment of Captain Lovelace's character, pocket, or place in life, and he is forced to say so, for this is no woman to be stormed at or child to be whipped, but a man who will have his answer. It is not easy to say no, no, no, over and over again, because it is no to a question that requires a more reasonable answer; thus papa, pressed for his reasons, can find none, save that Alice is a mere child, far too young to think of marrying for many years, etc.

»I am told,« says Captain Lovelace, »that Mrs. Adair was no older when you married her; you did not then consider her youth a drawback?«

»What Mrs. Adair did is no affair of yours, sir,« says papa fiercely.

»None whatever,« says Captain Lovelace, »save that it forms a precedent.«

There is a pause, and Alice makes a significant face to convey to us that the governor's countenance is the reverse of angelic. The fact is he is in a dilemma. He has had some experience of his daughter's admirers already, and he knows perfectly well that, if Tom is not in love with and wanting to marry her, it will be Dick or Harry, and that, if this young man is sent to the right about, there will be fifty others popping up before him, asking the same troublesome question. He also knows that Miss Alice has a spice of his own wilful, perverse temper in her (as, indeed, it would be odd if she had not; I often wonder we are not all demons), and that she is not very likely to prove a meek little fool, who will see all her lovers rapped on the head and sent about their business without knowing the reason why; and altogether, for once in his life he is compelled to think instead of to act.

There is some more conversation, and pretty sharp practice, between the two men, too; and more than once it seems probable that our expectations will be fulfilled, and the parting guest sped over our listening ranks, but in the end—oh,

wonder!—the lover prevails and wrings a most reluctant permission from the governor to pay his addresses to our sister for six months, and if at the end of that time no specks are discovered upon his character, or vice in his ways or words, he shall be considered engaged to Alice for an indefinite period, matrimony appearing dimly in the far horizon. (Papa is a sly old fox, he means to make fools of them both; as soon as ever they press for anything tangible he will send Captain Lovelace adrift, he only wants to gain time.)

Our faces express even more amazement than delight. We had so confidently reckoned on a violent scene, an unseemly exodus, and, behold! We all tumble backwards over each other as the door opens and her victorious sweetheart comes out, and catches her up in his arms like a baby, and what happens next I don't know, for we all scamper away like mad.

For many a day papa's face is black as ink, and he surveys Alice with a wonderfully equal mixture of scorn, impatience, and wrath, as though he found her a most indelicate and unpleasant spectacle. It is very strange that fathers who fell in love so naturally and comfortably when they were young, should so bitterly resent and feel so

utterly disgusted at their children's doing the same. If he had his way he would keep all his daughters withering for ever on their virgin stalks, and when they were miserable peaky old maids turn round upon them, and twit them with their incapacity to get a man to marry either of them.

For the first time in my life I am in a position to critically study the ways, looks, and words of a real handsome young pair of lovers. (I think all lovers should be young and good-looking; I can't fancy faded or elderly people peering into each other's dull faces.) I should not have so much opportunity, but that, ^{since} after patient and dispassionate trial of all her elder brothers and sisters as gooseberries, she has fixed her choice upon *me*, as being the sharpest, most unseeing and most unhearing of the lot, and fully one-half my time is spent in boudoir, garden, or summer-house, craning my neck round corners in anxious watch against the governor.

Charles Lovelace is supposed to pay two or three decorous visits a week, and sit in the drawing-room opposite Alice, with mother for dragon, talking of the weather. In reality he is here every day, and twice a day; but he is not proud or above being towed in and out, and on occasion hidden in the shrubbery or a cupboard. Once or twice it

has been a very close shave, and nothing but a special Providence and good luck has saved him from ignominious discovery. Their two faces look rarely well together, dark and fair; the bold, manly beauty of the one against the round, feminine, dainty perfection of the other. I think no woman's face ever shows its beauty to such advantage as when seen beside that of a man. How unweariedly they make love! How untiredly they utter their love-talk, of which now and then a word or two comes to my ears (I always turn my back upon them)—pretty, fanciful, tender stuff, that makes me smile and vaguely stirs my heart. If ever I have a sweetheart (and why should I not, since it is a well-known fact that all the plainest women marry before the good-looking ones, and to be married one must of course be courted), I hope Dolly will make as excellent a gooseberry as I do.

When Charles is paying lawful visits, he brings with him a little book, called »The Bundle of Sticks«; where he picked it up it would be hard to say; and this he reads diligently if papa ever comes into the room where they are sitting. The sarcastic twitch of the governor's nose and lips as he looks from the one lover to the other is something to wonder at. Now and then, when his back

is safely turned, they go out together for a stirring spin in Charles's dog-cart, in which he drives two fiery grey ponies tandem, and a very charming turn-out it looks, with the two handsome young people smiling over the white rug; and every one thinks so, save the disappointed old and young maids of St. Swithins.

CHAPTER X.

»Those that Fortune makes fair she scarce makes honest; and those she makes honest she makes very ill-favouredly.«

WE are at a children's party, Dolly and I. Jack was asked, but is too proud to come. It is five o'clock, and the sun, who has been standing over us all the afternoon, frizzling our brains, and making himself obnoxious, as he only knows how to do in the middle of July, is kindly sinking somewhat in the west. We have, with the usual insanity and waste of very young people, been playing at all manner of energetic games, and are now engaged in the comparatively mild recreation of »Kiss-in-the-ring«. Kissing is not reprehensible until one is grown up, I suppose; at any rate these little girls take their boisterous forfeits quite placidly, occasionally return them even with an artless generosity that is not half appreciated by the stolid recipients of the same.

I am not a little girl, but a big one, and there is no boy present old enough or tall enough to kiss me unless I choose. Besides, no one has

caught me yet, I can beat them all. I always was good at running; that and jumping being the two doubtful accomplishments Jack has taught me to perfection.

I am laughing heartily at the dismal fate my last pursuer has just met, his white duck trousers being in fact one green smudge from an involuntary acquaintance he made with mother earth, when Mrs. Floyd, our hostess, comes across the garden, and by her side is that yellow-haired laddie, young Tempest. Hardly a laddie though, for he must be twenty if he is a day, and has the square, broad-shouldered figure of a man.

A not particularly clean piece of cambric dropped at my heels, and a vision of a nimble youth of tender years scurrying away in the distance, sets me off in fleet pursuit. He has a good start so I do not catch him, but walk slowly round until I come to Teddy Minto, who is the spryest on his legs of the assembled company next to me. He is after me like a shot; but though I take him twice round the ring, his fingers do not once touch my gown, and I dive in between Dolly and Lily Floyd victorious. All at once young Tempest joins the ring; and presently, on receiving a dropped token from Lily, rushes after, catches, and kisses

her to her huge delight, for is he not the biggest person present? I wish Jack was here! He would not care about it though, he would think it beneath him, while I—it only shows what an insignificant creature I am—love it. I am enjoying myself down to the ground.

»Look, Nell!« cries Dolly, unloosing my hand; and turning my head, I see behind me the symbol that invites me to pursuit. Off I set with a will, but I do not come up with the hare, who is young Tempest; on the contrary, his long legs bear him away with a fleetness that moves me to grudging envy.

»I wonder,« I say to myself, as I walk round swinging the pocket-handkerchief, »whether *he* could catch me? We will see.« Lightly I drop it behind him, swiftly I fly along; but I am not a dozen yards away when he is up with me, and I am caught, without his ever giving me a chance.

»Now for the forfeit,« he says, as he lifts me from the ground and stoops his head to mine. I meet his saucy, bent face with a vigorous slap that turns it scarlet, but he never moves or blushes, only looks at me with frank, amused blue eyes, before which my sudden anger melts like snow before the sun.

»Put me down,« I say, and he puts me down. »I hope I—I didn't hurt much?« (looking up at him rather anxiously). »I did not mean to do it quite so hard, only you should not be rude, you know.«

»Lily did not mind,« he says, looking down on me with a queer smile.

»But Lily is not grown up,« I say with dignity. »Lily is only ten.«

»And you?«

»I am a great age,« I say, nodding, but I shall not tell you how much.«

»Are you not tired?« he asks. »Would you not like to sit down?« I look round; the ring is broken up; the boys and girls are strolling about; Mrs. Floyd has vanished.

»I don't mind,« I say; »but we are going in to tea soon.« We sit down under the beech tree and look at each other. »I know who you are,« I say, smiling. »You are young Mr. Tempest.«

»And you are little Miss Adair,« he says.

»How did you know that?«

»My father knows your father; besides, I sit opposite you in church.«

»Do you?« I ask with some dismay. Can he have marked any of Jack's and my ungodly tricks

during sermon time? For at St. Swithins' we sit behind papa, not beside him.

»Is that your eldest brother who sits beside you?«

»Yes,« I say proudly, »that is Jack. There is nobody like him.«

»Is he here?« asks the young man looking round.

»No, he would not come. You see he is fifteen, and he likes boys. He used to be satisfied with *me*, but now« A tear trickles down my nose, and I turn my head away. It is a very, very sore subject with me. »It is all such a mistake,« I say, rubbing my nose and eyes hard, »that I was not a boy, you know. He and I would have been together always, whereas now—— It is very hard!«

»Very,« says the young man, and indeed he seems to understand. »Who is that pretty little girl yonder? She looks like a crumpled pink rose.«

»Does she not?« I ask eagerly; »that is Dolly, my sister.«

»You are not a bit alike!«

»I know we are not,« I say, looking at her with pride; »my sisters are all pretty, every one; I am the only unpresentable one out of the whole lot. Now if you were to see Alice——«

»I have seen her,« he says, »she is quite lovely. But you are every bit as good as Dolly, or—nicer.«

»Oh no!« I say, laughing; »you need not bother about saying anything like that to me, please; I am quite used to being plain. Nurse comforts me by saying that the ugliest children sometimes grow into the best looking folk, but I know better.«

»George,« says Mrs. Floyd, bearing down upon us with all sails spread, »you promised to help me give the children their tea; are you coming?«

So we go in and eat cake and drink coffee, and by-and-by, having washed our hot faces and hands, and smoothed our tumbled locks, we assemble in a large room, forty souls odd, for the purpose of dancing. The Floyd's governess sits down to the piano; but alas! whether it is the painful consciousness of their extreme neatness, or whether they are really unequal to the duties of »footing« a polka, all the little boys present hang together in groups, and look askance at the rows of shiny-cheeked, smooth-headed damsels, who are waiting to be fetched out.

This uncomfortable state of things having lasted for some time, the female wit (as is usual when things are at a dead lock) comes to the rescue,

and Madge Weston, a black-browed miss of twelve, rises from her seat and walks across the room to the halting army. »I shall dance with *you*, Clem,« she says decidedly; and, taking the biggest boy by the arm, she leads him away. The spell once broken, each little girl walks boldly up to the boy that is goodliest in her eyes, and bears him off triumphantly, though some of them utter feeble protests, and show a tendency to hang back. And now they are off, giggling, ambling, floundering, and young George Tempest, entering hurriedly, looks about the room, and then comes up to me.

»I can't dance,« I say confidentially, as he sits down beside me; »it is like a donkey gambolling in a drawing-room. Can you?«

»Pretty well; but I should have thought you knew how; you are quite the nimblest runner I ever saw.«

»One does not want to be nimble in dancing,« I say gravely, »or it must be reduced to a method to answer. Jack says my head always hits the ceiling when I try to waltz.«

»Miss Dolly seems to be labouring under difficulties,« says my companion, glancing toward my little sister, who is ambitiously trying to reach the shoulder of the very tall, lanky boy she has selected

as partner; »he has lost her altogether two or three times. Supposing you and I see what we can do?»

»It would be worse than Dolly,« I say, laughing.
»No, no! let us sit still and look on. I want to ask you something, if you don't mind. Is Mr. Tempest your real father?»

»Yes. Why?»

»You are not a bit like him,« I say, considering his comely features and the fresh, bright look that, let folks say what they will about the expression that comes with years, etc., is goodly and pleasant in a young man's or a maiden's face. »He looks so dried up; so, so brown. Do you know, it is very rude, but Jack and I always call him the *Mummy*!«

Young George Tempest laughs, and reassures me as to a doubt that has just crossed my mind, as to whether that was a suitable remark to make to a young man about his father.

»Don't you think that on the whole papas are a great mistake, and that we should get on much better without them?»

»I don't know,« says the young man, smiling,
»but you surely would never say that of mothers?»

»Never!« I answer energetically; »but tell me, what does your father do? Does he expect you

to talk? Does he insist on your going out walking with him, all the lot of you, except your mother?»

»I have no mother,« he says soberly, »and no brothers or sisters. No, he does not make me walk unless I please; but I am his walking-stick, his pourer-out of medicine, his lacquey (rather bitterly), who wanders all over the world with him, learning no good.«

»Learning no good!« I repeat. (I was always rather like a monkey, and fond of echoing other folks' words.) »Have you not a profession? Do you not do anything? You are old enough!«

»Ay!« he says, and a sudden shadow falls upon his blonde, bright face. »I was to have gone into the army, and even had my commission in the Guards, but at the last moment my father refused to let me join. He said I was his only son, that he could not live many years, and so (with a short, impatient sigh) I am knocking about with nothing on earth to do. If only Providence had sent me one or two of your brothers!«

»I have six,« I say proudly; »there are five running after Dolly, but I could not spare one of them to you.«

»I suppose not,« he says, with a smile. »Do

you ever smack their heads as you did my cheek this afternoon?»

»Sometimes! only, to tell you the truth, they are getting rather beyond me. Were you angry when I slapped you this afternoon?»

»Very! I hope you will never do it again.«

»But then *you* must never do it again.«

»But I did not.«

»If you were me,« I say seriously, »you would be sick of the very name of kissing; we have such oceans of it at home!»

»Ah! I suppose so. Your father must be very fond of you all?»

»Very!« I say with a wry face, »but it is not *he* who is lavish in that respect« (I giggle inwardly at the notion of his going about the house kissing us promiscuously), »it is my sister; she is engaged, you know.«

»To Lovelace? So I have heard.«

»I am gooseberry, you see,« I continue, »and I do get so tired of it all. Do you think our fathers and mothers ever required gooseberries?»

»I don't know,« he says, laughing, »but I suppose they did pretty much the same as their children do?»

The polka is over, and very hard work the

dancers have apparently found it, for they are all, boys and girls alike, *crimson*.

By-and-by we dance a quadrille, young Mr. Tempest and I, and he guides me through the mazes of that mysterious dance with much discretion. I wonder why the sight of two people *chasséing* to each other always reminds me of two amiable ponies, who curvet about face to face with each other, preparatory to turning round, and letting out their heels in good, honest kicks? We do not kick up our heels, though; and when the dance is over go to supper, where we eat chicken and tipsy cake with the hearty and unjaded appetite of youth, and then, for it is past ten o'clock, we all say, »Good-night, and thank you,« and go away to put on our cloaks and hats.

Balaam's Ass is waiting for Dolly and me, and George Tempest takes my little red cloak from her hands, and ties the ribbons under my chin.

»Good-bye, little Red Riding Hood,« he says, »and shall I ever see you again?«

»I shall be sure to run up against you sooner or later,« I say, nodding; »St. Swithins is so very little; besides, do you not live at Silverbridge, and are you not going back to live there some day?«

CHAPTER XI.

»We are such stuff

As dreams are made of, and our little life

Is rounded with a sleep.«

WE are in August now, and there is no coolness anywhere, not in the house, nor in the garden, nor in the sea; twice to-day have I dipped in its salt waters, and each time I have come out of it ten degrees hotter than when I stepped in. Through the dining-room windows yonder we can hear the manly bass of the governor, and the shrill little pipe of the Mummy, following each other in friendly monotony, and out here, under the big linden tree, are sitting Jack, young Mr. Tempest, and I.

The weather has surely softened papa's brain, for, not content with shaking hands with Mr. Tempest, he invited both him and his son to dinner, and has just peaceably partaken of the same with them; Mother, Charles Lovelace, and Alice being also of the company. George and I are old friends now, and he gets on very well with Jack, so he

has forsaken claret for our company; and very sociable and merry we are as we sit and fan ourselves with cabbage leaves, for oh! though the sun is sinking, he has heated the earth so thoroughly, that it is red-hot through and through; it is impossible to think of even the hours of the night being cool.

Yonder, in the winding ways of the formal garden, Alice and Charles are walking with their heads touching; she is holding up her white silk train with one hand, and her pretty little feet are peeping in and out, while the white roses in her breast and hair are no fairer than her round arms and neck.

»I wish we were at Silverbridge!« I say, swaying my cabbage leaf gently; »it goes to my heart to be sitting here, gooseberryless, currantless, raspberryless, while all the little Dorleys are, I am certain, taking their nasty little fills! Mother wanted to have the fruit sent to us once a week, but papa said it was to be preserved.«

»I hate preserves,« says Jack, »nasty apologies for fresh fruit; blackberry jam's good though.«

»Did you ever make jam of sloes?« I ask George Tempest, »that cleaves to the roof of your mouth and won't be swallowed?«

»Never! Did you?«

»Once, but we only made one pot, and it lasted years; whenever we were very hungry, and quite at our wit's end, we used to take it out and look at it, but never got any further, and at last it withered up. I wish I knew where to get some blackberries now, large juicy, soft ones, like raspberries; but it's full early, I don't think we'll get any worth having before September.«

»I saw a lot this morning« says George, »as I was riding across the lower—— («Jack!« calls mother in the distance, »I want you.«) landslip,« finishes George as Jack goes. »Would you like to go and get some?«

»So much!« I say quickly. »Are there many?«

»I think so; why cannot you and Dolly come with me to-morrow morning?«

»We are forbidden to go out alone,« I say thoughtfully; »you won't mind Amberley coming?«

»Indeed, I do,« he says laughing. »What do you want with that stupid old woman? We could have such a jolly morning.«

»So we could,« I say, considering; »I think I could dodge *her* all right; but how about the governor?«

»He goes for a ride sometimes.«

»Yes, but not always. Supposing he were to inquire for us and we were missing?«

»What then?«

»What then? Oh, nothing!« A vision rises before me of the condition of the household under the circumstances, and his simple question makes me smile.

»Don't take any notice of him,« says George indifferently (It is all very fine for *him* to talk); »I shall be waiting on the Parade for you to-morrow morning at eleven o'clock punctually.«

»I am afraid you will have to wait,« I say disconsolately; »but never mind, if we don't come, you will know it is not our fault!«

»The governor!« signals Jack, beckoning in the distance; so, without waiting for farewells, I hastily decamp. By-and-by the sound of music rising from the drawing-room gives us a new sensation. Never within the memory of man, certainly not within ours, has the piano's modest voice been uplifted in papa's presence; but, lo! at the magic touch of company its long-frozen melodies stream forth, and there is a convivial, rakish, bacchanalian sound about the festivities below that lifts the hair from off our youthful heads in amazement; we should not be surprised even, if on peeping in we dis-

covered papa affably turning over the pages of Alice's music; he may, for all we know, be drinking tea. This mildness of temper if agreeable is alarming; can he be going to have a fever or a fit? or has the sun actually melted some of the obstinacy out of his brain? Middle-aged gentlemen don't act in direct opposition to all the traditions of their past lives for nothing. If his wits would only go on softening until he is just like anybody else! I fall asleep with the cheerful tune of »Kiss me quick and go, my honey,« in my ears. Somehow it seems indecent as sung before the governor.

We have all slept, risen, dressed ourselves (Of all the machines that are yearly invented for reducing labour to a minimum, why is there not one for turning us out ready dressed? Who is there that does not now and then kick against the wearisome, ever-recurring duties of the toilet?), listened to prayers, eaten our breakfasts, and scattered hither and thither to our several pursuits and occupations. It is holiday time with us, so I am not expected in the school-room, and my present object in life is to ascertain what the governor is doing, where he is going, and whether there is any dire chance of his catching Dolly and me just as we are trotting off to »pastures new«.

I carefully track him to the library, and am presently surprised and relieved by the appearance of his man of business, who is shown to that sanctum by Simpkins, and left for four good hours, I hope. And now to find Dolly. I have not mentioned to that young person that I meditated taking her out, or her eyes would have become so round, that everybody would have suspected she was up to mischief, and on searching inquiry she would certainly have let it all out. I discover her in the nursery with Alan, learning Scripture history—the fag-end of a punishment given by papa weeks ago. I give nurse a hug. Dear old soul! is she not like a second mother to us? but wish she would turn her back; for if she is loving she is shrewd, and is too well acquainted with my knack of getting into scrapes to trust any one of her charges to my tender mercies. She is hemming dusters and rating Balaam's Ass, who with her usual obstinacy has been doing that which she ought not to have done, and left undone such things as she ought to have done. Apparently she has been taking the air on the leads, for nurse is remarking with a violent sniff, »that rent will soon be dear in these parts if so much beauty is seen disporting itself on the tiles.« (B. A. is the most ill-favoured young woman I ever saw.)

»Like Bathsheba,« says Alan.

»Nurse,« says Dolly, looking up from her book, »who was Bathsheba?«

»Nobody in particular, Miss Dolly; nobody you have any call to ask about. A woman.«

»She was an improper person,« says Alan unexpectedly.

»Sakes alive!« ejaculates nurse, holding up her hands; »whatever is the boy talking about? Hold your tongue, Master Alan, and mind your book.«

»I shan't,« says Alan, resting his chin on his hand, and regarding nurse with meditative eyes. »You know it as well as I do. I heard Jack humming something the other day about—

‘That naughty little dragon,
And she without a rag on;’

And I asked him who *she* was, and he said *Bathsheba*. And I looked it out, and I shan't ever think much of David again, psalms and all.«

Nurse looks at him helplessly as he returns to his book. Why do our elders always look so completely put out of countenance when we show any signs of shooting up in unexpected directions? They did the same when *they* were children.

Taking advantage of her departure to quell a

riot among the boys in the next room, I catch Dolly's hand and pull her away with me.

»May not Alan come?« she asks, looking back.

»No,« I say in a whisper; »I only want *you*.« I trot her into my bed-room, and having informed her of the trip I propose taking, ask her if she can get at her hat and jacket without nurse's knowing.

Yes, she can, and, all delight and round eyes, she departs on tiptoe, obtains the coveted articles, and in five minutes, after patient and careful dodging of mother, Amberley, Simpkins, and Alice, we stand on the high road, and are scampering away as fast as we can pelt towards the Parade.

Oh! the bonny, bonny sea! Though I see and stand by it every day, it always gives me a new delight every time my eyes light thereon. It is only half-past ten; there is plenty of time and to spare, so we betake ourselves to Tippet's, the confectioner; and as—oh, wonder!—I actually possess a sixpence, we indulge in one bun each, one sponge-cake each, and a pennyworth apiece of bull's-eyes. Delicious! We are thirsty, but lemonade is beyond us, so we drink water unthankfully (Why does every one take kindly to adulterated and manufactured drinks, and turn

away disdainfully from the only pure liquid the world contains?), and then take a comfortable little trot round the town, glueing our noses to shop windows; pausing to look at the omnibus starting for the railway station; helping to pick up an unfortunate pair of twins who have been rolled out of their perambulator by an elder sister, aged seven years; standing still to watch a man walking round and round his horse in the vain effort to mount it; diving into a chemist's shop to get out of the way of old Mr. Tempest; feeling, in short, very dissipated, very happy, and intensely, grandly independent. Eleven o'clock is striking as we reach the Parade, and at the far end is George. Seeing us, he steps out briskly, and in another two minutes we are shaking hands and laughing over the success of our undertaking.

»We must be very quick though,« I say, »for some unlucky spirit may put it into his head to ask for us, and then——«

»How do you do, Miss Adair?« asks a voice behind me. Turning, I see Bobbie Silver and two or three other young fellows, friends of Jack.

»How do you do?« I say, rather chap-fallen: they will see Jack presently, and tell him they

saw me down here alone. Oh, the ways of disobedience arve ery crooked!

»And where is the duenna?« asks Bobbie.

I am opening my mouth to answer him, when in the distance I espy Balaam's Ass bearing down upon us with a portentous mien that betokens some deadly tidings. The words I am about to speak die in my lips; my open mouth remains open; my widening eyes enlarge to their fullest extent and remain fixed. The young men, marvelling, turn to ascertain the cause of my petrification.

»If you please, Miss Helen and Miss Dolly,« says Balaam's Ass, appearing in our midst, *»your pa says you're to go home and go to bed directly!«*

She might have whispered. . . . I do not look at Bobbie or George. I look nowhere; I see nothing. Why does not the earth open and swallow us up? Somehow, I do not know how to this day, we got ourselves away.

»How dare he do it?« I say, as I climb the steep hill that leads to our abode, with bitter tears raining down my burnt cheeks, hot anger and outraged pride scorching my heart, *»just as we were so happy, Dolly! How shall I ever look one of them in the face again!«* And I am fourteen years old! Truly *»pride goes before a fall!«*

CHAPTER XII.

»This is the excellent foppery of the world, that when we are sick in fortune (often the surfeit of our own behaviour), we make guilty of our disasters, the sun, the moon, and the stars; as if we were villains by necessity, fools by heavenly compulsion.«

My last little escapade has cost me dear. Not only have I been condemned to a week's imprisonment in the house and grounds, but the edict has gone forth that I shall be sent to school without loss of time. I have long ago wept my eyes dry. I do not think that I shall ever be able to cry any more, not even when I find myself set down in the midst of a crowd of nasty, spiteful, odious, chattering girls; if there were a few boys I would not mind, but to have nothing but petticoat company for five months will, I am certain, drive me mad. If Dolly were coming even, it would not be so bad, we could at least hold together and talk about home; I should not be so miserably lonely then; but no such luck, Amberley is still good enough for another two years' cultivation of that little person's mind. How I shall hate the

needlework, and the bread and butter, and the making my own bed every morning! and, oh! how I shall have to mend my manners and revise my vocabulary! Remarks that are merely spicy among ourselves might be regarded by a schoolmistress in a different light, and our freedom and ease of invective and retort be considered immoral.

Everybody is out this evening, papa and all, and I have not a soul to speak to but Paul Pry, who does not understand if I do talk to him. I cannot even make myself of use by playing gooseberry. How Alice will miss me when I am gone! The ghost of a tear comes into my eye at this touching thought (which is after all nothing but that *pitié de soi-même* that is at once so pitiful and so natural). They cannot choose but miss me, though, I befear me, the cause of my being so regretted will be but selfish. Love on, poor lovers! By Christmas your billings and cooings will be over, and you, Mr. Charles, will be sent to the right-about. How the governor's patience has lasted as long as it has done, I can't imagine. It is dull work marching about here all alone, with no fruit trees to rob, or sociable soul to exchange remarks with. I have not seen George since that fatal day, although he has been here two or three times.

Somehow I cannot forgive him for having been a witness to my disgrace, and I owe him a grudge for having a nasty little father who did see Dolly and me when we bolted into the chemist shop, and, meeting papa on the hill, told him, but with no malicious intent, that he had just seen us; hence the catastrophe. There never was anybody as unlucky as I am; everything has gone wrong with me ever since I was born, and everything will continue to do until my death, which is certain to take place in some unseemly, unexpected manner, at some unsuitable time and spot. I suppose my own bad conduct is at the bottom of most of my misfortunes, though. Now that last *fiasco* was caused by love of blackberries, *ergo* greediness, which is distinctly a failing of my own, and nothing to do with an unlucky star! I wish I could commit my sins with my eyes shut. I know so perfectly well always when I am doing anything wrong, I see the good and the evil so clearly, the one on the right hand the other on the left, and yet, oh, shame! I nearly always choose the ill. Perhaps it is because I know my own wicked heart so well, that I, who am the merriest, noisiest, happiest of us all, have such deep, bitter fits of depression and misery now and then. In comparison with the

keenness of enjoyment is the power of enduring pain, they say. If ever God sees fit to send me a great joy, I shall taste its sweetness to the uttermost; but if a great trouble come upon me, I shall bear every jot of its weight and hardness, and never seek to shift it to other shoulders, or contrive to bear it lightly. Clearly I am in a lachrymose and dismal frame of mind this evening; generally speaking, after a good howl, my spirits fly up to the skies, but this time I do not feel any the better, and if tears were forthcoming I would begin it all over again.

As I stroll along the coppice that divides our grounds from the high road, I hear a gay young voice whistling, »My love, she's but a lassie yet;« it sounds quite cheerful, and almost puts me in spirits. I hope he will not go away directly, for, oh! I do hate to be all alone without a human voice within earshot. I have not looked upon the countenance of man, woman, or child for a whole hour; to see anybody would be company, so I mount the hedge, preparatory to taking a small peep over it. Even a commercial traveller; or a rustic Lubin waiting for his sweetheart, would be nicer to look at than these still, straight trees and the stupid, silent grass. Popping my head somewhat suddenly over the hedge, I find myself face

to face with George Tempest. For a moment I stare speechlessly at him, then I drop the boughs, vanish from his sight, and run fleetly down the coppice. I hear his voice calling »Nell! Nell!« after me, and in another minute he has overtaken me, and stands in my path.

»Won't you speak to me, Nell?« he asks, rather blown and out of breath with his exertions.

»Can't stop now,« I say indistinctly, turning a scarlet countenance over my shoulder; »somebody is calling me.«

»Nobody is calling you,« he says quickly, »are you angry with me, Nell?«

»Angry!« I repeat, turning round my face, which is, I think, assuming its normal tint, »why should I be angry?«

»Come back into the coppice for a little while then,« he says; »you can't be going in yet, it is only seven o'clock.«

For a moment I hesitate. I am ashamed to look him in the face, but will it not be intolerably dull all alone in the empty house yonder? I turn and walk beside him. »Do you know,« he says, »that I have been looking out for you every day and all day for the last fortnight, but I have never caught a single glimpse of you?«

»For the best of all reasons,« I answer; »did you not know I was in punishment?«

»No!« he replies indignantly. »What a shame! and pray whose doing was that?«

»There is only one person in the world who has the power to make us miserable,« I say, »and you know who *that* is.«

»But you have not been locked up,« he says, looking puzzled, »for one day I was here with Jack, and I am certain I saw you in the distance, and went in hot pursuit, but you had vanished. When I got back I asked Jack why you ran away, and how it was I never saw you now, and he said he didn't know.«

»Good boy!« I say, laughing, he would not betray me. »It is not nice, is it, when one is beginning to be grown up, to be kept prisoner for a fortnight?«

»He is a wretch,« says George, vigorously, »how he can have the heart. . . .«

»I want to ask you a question,« I say, looking up at his face, reassured by the unsmiling look it wears— »did you—did you—laugh much?«

»About what, dear?«

»That—that morning, when we went out black-berrying.«

»No,« he says gently, »I was far too angry for that.«

»And Bobbie Silver?« I ask with my head turned away, »did *he* laugh?«

»I don't think so,« says George, with some slight confusion in his voice, that plainly tells me whatever he did *not* do, the others did.

»I shall never forget it,« I say, turning my red face full upon him— »*never!* You see I am just beginning to be grown up. . . .«

»Never mind!« he says gently, »it is *he* who ought to be ashamed of himself, not you!«

»And you will promise,« I say anxiously, »never to laugh, never even to think of it, or I could never feel comfortable with you!«

»I promise,« he says gravely; »and now tell me, is it true you are going to school?«

»Quite true!« I answer, »horribly true! To-day is Friday, and I am going next Wednesday.« I thought I had no such things as tears about me, but somehow they have got into my voice, and as I turn my head away, George takes my hand with a gentleness that Jack never knew, and keeps it.

»I wish you were my brother,« I say, with a sob; »of course I could never have loved any one

so well as Jack, but you would have been *kinder* to me!«

»If I had had a little sister,« he says (How soothing his voice is! how quiet his ways are! He is not like any one I have ever known before. Can it be because he has no brothers and sisters?), »I should have liked her to be just like you, and I should have loved her beyond everything; but it is too late to think of that *now*.«

»Yes, it is too late,« I say, releasing my hand to pluck a sorrel leaf that is close to my elbow (we are sitting down on the warm burnt grass); »but if you had only thought of it before, say ten years ago, you could have asked your father to marry again, could you not?«

»Yes?« says George, looking rather puzzled.

»And then, you know, you would very likely have had a sister. Step-brothers and sisters are not the same as one's *own*, though; sometimes they quarrel dreadfully!«

»Nell,« says George, bending his fair head to look me straight in the face, »Do you like me?«

»Very much,« I answer promptly; »next to mother, Jack, Alice, and Dolly, I don't know any one I like so much.« His face falls a little.

»I can't expect you to have much room in

your heart for me,« he says, »you have so many to fill it, while I have—nobody.«

»You have the Mummy.«

»Yes« (laughing), »but I have room for plenty more.«

»So have I! Now I should not wonder if, in a year or two, when I get to know you better, you know, I were to like you very much indeed, almost as well as Jack; you are always so good to me!«

»Dear little Nell,« he says heartily, »I only hope you will. You'll have plenty of opportunity of getting better acquainted with me, for my father talks of going to Silverbridge next midsummer, to live at The Chace.«

»How delightful!« I say, clapping my hands, »but why not before midsummer?«

»We are going on our usual wild goose expedition round the continent,« he says disgustedly, »and a lively time I shall have of it!«

»It will be such fun,« I say, following my own train of thought, »when I am grown up and come home for good, you and Jack and I will be such friends!«

»Nell,« says the young man, leaning over towards me, »do you think you will ever care for me *as much* as Jack?«

»It is not likely!« I say, smiling into his bright, eager, beautiful young face, »you are not my brother, you know!«

»And I am very glad of it,« he says decidedly.

»Glad?« I say, opening my eyes, »and you said just now you should like a sister just like me!«

»Just like you, perhaps, but *not you*. Nell, do you think you will ever be married?«

»Oh! I suppose so,« I answer indifferently; »everybody is sooner or later. It is wretched to be an old maid, with no one to stand up for you, is it not?«

»Very! Have you any notion of what your husband ought to be like, Nell?«

»My husband!« I repeat, breaking into a peal of laughter. »How droll it sounds; it is like playing at a feast; and yet mother knew a lady who was married at sixteen, her mother at fifteen, and her grandmother at fourteen!«

»Then it is high time you were married! But you have not told me what he must be like?«

»Dark,« I say, pursing up my mouth, and looking at the sun who is passing away to his rest in such gorgeous pomp with his bright children, the clouds, thronging about him. »*Very* dark; and he must have black or very dark eyes, and a

long black moustache that sweeps, but is not waxed.«

»Yes.«

»He must keep me in rare good order, and not let me get my own way, for though I love to have it, it is bad for me; but he must never slap me or call me names.«

»Good heavens!« exclaims George, »does a gentleman ever do that?«

»Sometimes! And he must be very fond of my people, and have them to stay with us very often, and let me go and stop with them.«

»And you are quite sure he must be dark?«

»I think so; but if he were very nice and kind, I should not mind so much about his complexion.«

»Do you think that I should do, Nell?« asked the young man, half eagerly, half jestingly, »when you are quite grown up, eighteen or thereabouts?«

»*You!*« I say, staring at him. »Oh, George! do you mean it; are you joking?«

»Not a bit of it! You are the dearest little girl, and the nicest little girl, and the prettiest little girl I ever saw, and you'll only be dearer and nicer and prettier as you grow older, and I'm fonder of you than anything or anybody under the sun.«

»Including the Mummy?« I ask, rallying from the shock his calling me pretty has caused me.

»Including him!«

»George!« I say, beginning to cackle again.
»Don't think me very rude, but is it, is it a *real* offer you have made me?«

»I suppose so,« he says, beginning to laugh too, »why?«

»Because not one of us, not even Alice, had an offer made her at the age of fourteen before. I'm certain no one ever asked Milly to marry her, and I don't think any one ever did Jack?«

»Highly improbable! But you have not answered my question yet.«

»Papa could not send me to bed if I were married, could he? or set me chapters in the Bible, or box my ears?«

»Certainly not.«

»And you would always live at Silverbridge, close to the Manor House, so that I could run in and out every day?«

»If you liked.«

»Then,« I say, stretching out my hand, »if you are quite sure that you will always be polite to Jack, and never call me names, or make a row about the housekeeping bills, or keep the key of the

kitchen garden, I will marry you! Not for years and years though, when I am twenty or so.«

»That would be much too old to be married,« says George. »It would be a pity not to come to The Chace while you are young and able to enjoy the fruit. Eighteen is the proper age!«

»Too soon,« I say, shaking my head, »let us say eighteen and a half; but, of course, if I see any one I like better, you won't mind my having him?«

»Not mind,« he says blankly; »but I shall mind very much indeed! However, I'll take care that you never have the chance!«

»You need not be afraid,« I say, consolingly; »no living man is ever seen in Silverbridge who is not married or old or a fright! Besides, who would be likely to fall in love with me?«

»Everybody!« he says warmly, »they couldn't help it!«

»I think,« I say, disregarding this pretty compliment (of course he does not expect me to notice it, he only does it to please me!), »that it would be safer to promise conditionally. Most likely you will see some one or other who would just suit you, and then you might feel uncomfortable about me; and though it is very unlikely that any one

else will ever want to marry me, for at home we see nobody, it is just possible that I might run up against somebody I liked better, or I might not care about being married at all, you know; so we will leave it open until I am eighteen and a half!«

»And it is a promise?« he says, holding my hand between both his own, and looking very kindly into my face. (How his mother would have loved him if she had lived, he has such lovable ways.) »You will not forget?«

»No,« I say promptly, »I always keep my promises: ask Jack if I do not—that is one reason why he says I ought to have been a boy! But look, how dusk it is growing! I must go. Good-night!«

»Good-night,« he says, standing over me, tall and fair in the gathering shadows. »Perhaps this is the last time I shall have a chance of speaking to you alone before you go, dear?«

»I suppose so.«

»Then, Nell, as you're going to be my little wife some day, and I have no sister, you know—nobody to be good to me, won't you give me a kiss, just a little one, before you go?«

»Of course I will!« I say, touched to the heart

by the allusion to his narrow, loveless home life; then, as he stoops his head, I lift myself on tiptoe, and kiss his cheek as heartily as though it were Jack's. »I wish you were my brother,« I say warmly— »I do wish it with all my heart!«

CHAPTER XIII.

»Virtue! a fig! 'Tis ourselves that we are thus or thus. Our bodies are our gardens to the which our wills are gardeners . . . either to have it sterile with idleness, or manured with industry; why, the power and corrigible authority of this lies in our wills.«

THE morning of my departure has arrived. The carriage is at the door, my boxes are on the roof, and if anything could console me at this trying moment, it would be the knowledge of the number of good things one bursting hamper contains. As it is, I am vaguely conscious of some pleasant morsel at the back of my mind that will by-and-by emerge to the front and comfort me. I have swallowed half an egg and a pint of salt tears for breakfast; I have wished papa good-bye, or rather I have aimed a damp shot at his nose between the sheets (he is ill); and now I am standing in the hall, hugging my plentiful brothers and sisters all round, kissing them passionately with streaming cheeks and loud sobs that might melt the heart of a stone. Finally I bolt headlong into the carriage, where mother sits awaiting me, and burrow in the floor thereof. Charles Lovelace puts his

head in at the window to squeeze a tiny packet into my hand. I cannot thank him, for my voice is attuned to nothing but howls; and away we go. I lift myself from my abased position to wave my dripping pocket-handkerchief at the group by the door, and find some small comfort in the fact that they are crying, every one, except Charles. The sight of their regret gives me a fresh access of grief, and I am just retiring behind my useless handkerchief to indulge in a storm of sobs when the carriage stops, and George Tempest comes to the window. »Good-bye,« he says, taking my hand in his, and looking painedly at my blubbered, miserable face, »good-bye!« That is all he says, and yet he conveys as much sorrow and sympathy in the homely word as though he had talked for an hour. As we drive on again I begin a fresh bout that includes the leaving *him* in its grievances; and by the time we reach the station I am damp enough to give any one near me a cold, if it were winter instead of summer time. Jack fishes me out, and puts me in the waiting-room with the rest of the light luggage, and, while the footman gets our tickets, he tries to revive my drooping spirits by sketches as to what we will do in the Christmas holidays. But oh! on this burning dog-

day, Christmas seems a very, very long way off; besides, why should I not be having my holidays now instead of looking five months ahead? I ought not to be going at all.

The train comes snorting in—how sickeningly hot it looks!—and somehow I am bundled into it. As it is starting I lean out of the window, and, regardless of porters and his own disgust, I hug Jack round the neck with despairing energy and a splashing shower of tears. »Good-bye!« I cry, waving my wet rag and scarlet nose out of the window as long as he is in sight; then I tumble back into the carriage, plump into the arms of a nervous, spindle-shanked, elderly gentleman, who shoots me off his knees with such vigour, that I fly into a seat on the opposite side. It matters very little to me where I am, for my whole attention is taken up with hard crying—crying that is as unlike other people's tears as a floodgate is to a brooklet. I wonder if, when I am grown up, I shall get out of this habit of wasteful, exhaustive weeping? I always did save my troubles up into a lump, and clear them all off at once. It takes me some time to begin, but when I do I don't stop in a hurry. We are half-way to our destination before my nose and cheeks have lost their

first glossy shininess, and the elderly gentleman has shut his gaping mouth of amazement. Thank goodness, I have mother; and after a while she brings me to a tolerable state of composure.

Charteris, the place to which I am going, is eighty miles from home; so it is evening before we arrive there—the last six miles being performed by coach through scenery that would delight me, were not my heart so heavy. We stop before a long, low building, with a great many windows in two level lines. It is approached by a handsome carriage drive terminating in a species of court, and the house door is entered by a porch. We are shown into a moderately large room, hung with maps. It has a stiff, schoolish air that chills me, and prepares my soul for all manner of cold, barren, loveless laws and habits. What would I not give for our battered, noisy, disreputable old school-room at Silverbridge? The door opens, and Miss Tyburn enters, stately, imposing, grave. She scans me so closely as she takes my hand, that I feel she is reading to the very bottom of my soul. While she talks to mother I study her face, which is an uncommon one: command sits on her forehead; intellect and power look out of her eyes; upon her lips passion and will have set their seal;

over the whole countenance, and in the marvelously, perfectly formed head, is a remarkable air of penetration, determination, and clear common sense. Presently she asks mother if she would like to see the dormitories and schools, and we follow her along a glass corridor and into a dining-room, vast and square, with three large windows. The walls are hung with busts of Homer, Aristotle, Cicero, and all the grand old poets, senators, and orators. Over the mantelpiece hangs a picture of St. John and the Lamb painted in oils. We go through endless school and class-rooms, filled with girls who look with some astonishment at me as I walk behind my elders, and so upstairs to the dormitories, which are long and wide, with windows on both sides, and partitioned off into narrow bed-rooms just large enough to contain a bed and a small square box, while a curtained shelf runs across from one side to the other exactly above the bed, and a thick curtain closes in the room at the entrance. We go downstairs again, and very soon mother takes her departure. She is going to sleep the night at the house of a friend who lives twenty miles away. Oh, mother! mother! as you drive away do you know what a wretched, *wretched* child you leave behind?

Ay! she knows, and her heart is every whit as heavy as mine. I am too much in awe of Miss Tyburn to do more than sniff noiselessly after mother goes; besides, I have literally no tears left. One can be sorrier, I am sure, when one's eyes are dry than when they are wet. Miss Tyburn speaks to me kindly—indeed I am a spectacle that might move any one to compassion—and sends for »Mary Burns«, who presently comes—a gentle, fair, slim girl of fifteen, and into her charge am I given and dismissed. She takes me upstairs, and having washed my face and smoothed my hair, I go down with her to the school-room, where (for it is a half-holiday) about fifty girls are reading, writing, talking, laughing, moving about, and buzzing like a hive of bees. The noise comforts and reassures me. What I have dreaded was the stillness, the stiff formality of the life of routine; clearly my notions of female school life were mistaken ones.

On our arrival we are quickly surrounded, and I am chaffed, catechised, and overhauled in a sufficiently merciless fashion. Though somewhat taken aback, I prove however equal to the occasion; for I am not one of a large family for nothing—she who could retain any of that *mauvaise honte* yclept

bashfulness, or be unable to fight her own battles after the training I have had, would either be a vicious idiot or a solemn and self-satisfied prig. So I retort and *riposte* with a success that presently beats my assailants out of the field. They bear me no ill-will, though, any more than I do them; they do but seek to test the value of the metal, and small blame to them if on finding it to be a sham they cry out. I think they find I am not that, however; and though some hard knocks are exchanged, no malice is borne. By supper-time I am feeling tolerably cheerful, but my heart sinks again as after prayers a chorus of »good-nights« echoes around me, and a storm of kisses, both deep and loud, beats on my astonished ears. There are about sixty females of all ages present, and they all kiss one another with a hearty vigour that sounds as if they liked it.

We are not a kissing family at home: there is much affection between us, but little sentiment. Save when we have quarrelled, or are going a journey, we rarely embrace each other. It is a matter of course to kiss mother whenever we can, but we never dream of indiscriminate caresses among ourselves—that must indeed be a wonderful gush of misery or affection that produces a

hug. Therefore, lest I be pounced on and kissed in mistake for somebody else, I precipitately retire to my bed, where I sleep as soundly and well as though leaving home and going to school were a most regular, every-day affair.

An evil bell clanging through the pleasant tangle of a dream awakens me. Before I am half dressed it sounds again, but somehow or other I scramble downstairs behind the rest to the school-room, where lessons are gone through for an hour, while I look on; then prayers, conducted in a widely different fashion to that prevailing at home; then breakfast—good tea, good bread, sweet butter; then to church, where the service lasts half an hour. The church is scarcely bigger than a chapel, quite lovely in its dainty smallness, and far more richly garnished than are many more imposing edifices. The seats are of carved oak, every window is of stained glass—(I wonder why those strange stiff figures of saint and apostle, that violate every rule of art, impress us with the idea of a supernatural beauty that no amount of exquisite and correct drawing could afford?)—the east one, a soft blaze of colour through which the light falls on the tessellated chancel floor in glorious patches of amber, purple, green, and gold. It looks very hush-

ed, and quaint, and solemn; and as I slip into my seat in the chancel, which is divided from the body of the church by a carved screen, a wonderfully strange, novel sensation steals over me. It seems so odd to be kneeling without papa's stern eye upon me, and all the dear brothers and sisters stretching out right and left, in goodly sober ranks. The thought of them nearly sets me off crying again, for I have given my eyes a good rest during the night; but I fight the tears back and make my responses with the rest.

The clergyman almost makes me jump as I look at him: I have seen the same face, only twenty years younger maybe, hanging up in papa's study between a print of Taglioni in her best days, and a sporting celebrity, name unknown. We have even studied this man's face with impertinent interest, thanks to a remark mother made one day to the effect that papa and he had been »old friends«, and we have speculated often enough as to whether they ever kicked each other, or never fell out from sheer lack of opportunity.

I am sorry when the last »Amen« is spoken, and we step out of the dim cool church into the gaudy brisk day. I am sorrier still when, at ten o'clock, I am summoned to the committee-room,

and undergo at Miss Tyburn's hands a searching examination into the extent of my very limited mental capabilities, and to whatsoever questions are asked me on this, that, and t'other, write the answers down in a large volume that is called the committee book, but is in reality a Book of Doom, in which in her time many and many a girl has written herself down an ass. That I do the same you may be very sure, and I presently retire with the proud conviction that in ignorance I have beaten all my predecessors, every one.

In the afternoon I begin my real school life with needlework, over which in very good sooth my trouble begins, for though well versed in the arts of climbing and jumping, I am utterly ignorant of the gentle accomplishments of »felling«, and »stitching«. And so the day wears away, and the morrow comes, and very soon I get into the ways of my new life, and in spite of sundry homesick qualms and heart-sinkings, grow to love it very heartily. It has its ups and downs, its jealousies and bickerings, its hard lessons to be learned, and hard knocks submitted to; but none the less I find my school existence a wholesome, pleasant, happy one. There is no tyranny here. It is in a girl's own hands whether she gets on well or

badly. She will not be censured for faults she has not committed, or praised without just reason. Her work is plain and clear before her, and she can pursue it without let or hindrance. Every hour is well filled, every pleasure well earned, and the sleep that each night brings is sound and deep. Now and again I am seized with a passionate longing to see them all at home. I shut my eyes and picture them to myself so strongly, that my spirit seems to go out of my body and stand in their midst; I wander in at the school-room door, and look on all their faces, one by one, and if they only knew I was there, if they spoke to me, I am sure I should hear them. . . .

I had a letter from mother this morning. She bids me use my time profitably and waste none, for it is more precious than gold. She need not be afraid: I know that now is my apprentice time, now that breathing space that is given to all young people, and which, once wasted, will come back to them never more. Somehow a girl's mind at school always makes me think of a field on which the seed is sown, which will either take root and ripen abundantly, or wither away, leaving it bare and unadorned. I never knew how really ignorant I was till I came here. I don't remember ever

thinking about the matter, but I had a vague idea that I was a good deal worse than Alice, but rather better than Jack. *Now* I stand forth a confessed ignoramus, and am beaten at all points by pert youngsters of twelve and thirteen. Fortunately I know the nakedness of my mind, so there is a hope that at some future day it may be decently clad. It is curious that the more one knows the more acutely one feels one's bareness. Intensely, thoroughly ignorant people attain to a height of self-esteem, that the man who has spent a lifetime in amassing knowledge, only to find that all he knows is but a drop in the full cup of knowledge, can never hope to reach. My studies do not prevent my getting into plenty of scrapes; often and often my madcap pranks get me into hot water, but good luck pulls me safely through. We go for wonderful walks through such lovely country as Silverbridge could never boast. The school is built on the top of a hill, and on three sides the ground slopes away to the valleys. Following the road you descend this hill, and, crossing a bridge on the left, pass through the flower-bright fields, and so to the valleys through which a brook runs, leaping, sparkling, widening, narrowing, with a dainty border of forget-me-nots, and

reeds that stand up stiff and straight, like sentinels guarding the pretty flowers. On either side banks and woods rise steeply to a great height. In spring time, the girls say, they are speckled all over with spring flowers, of which there are many curious and unknown species, never met with in flatter, duller regions. And oh, it must be a rare and delicate sight to see these picturesque slopes putting on their thousand tints of green and yellow, and one for which my eyes look eagerly. These valleys are strangely cool and deep and silent not a sound breaks the stillness save the fretting of the water against the stones, or the infrequent song of the birds—clearer, sweeter here, I always think, than anywhere else. To me these valleys always seem to have remained just as they left God's hand at the creation of the world, they are so fresh, so pure, so untrodden, with their vernal shades and dim, cool alleys. A deep peace broods ever over them, and the weary, struggling, sinful world seems very far away. Walking in them one feels the faint echo of some such exquisite delight as Adam and Eve knew when they walked together in the garden of Paradise for the first time, when it was all new, fresh from God's hand, and their souls were innocent and pure enough to taste

its exceeding delicacy. I think none but the very young or the very old can enjoy nature thoroughly; with the latter the heart and mind are dulled, and ordinary events and interests have little power over them, and they go back to that simplicity of mind that makes the treasures of the earth suffice without the excitement of the passions of the heart, while the very young look on it with unjaded eyes, and no restless longing after things they do not know and have never dreamed of. The nightingale has made his home down here. He sings at night to the brook, to the silent glades, to his mistress; and I know by the rapture of his voice that he rejoices in the beauty around him as keenly as though he had a human soul. Often I softly open my window to listen to his deathless song, and wish that I were in the valley below standing on the moon-lit sward alone with the night, the little brown bird, and my own delight. And I grow to love these hills and valleys with an exceeding love that I never knew for Silverbridge; and I know that some day when I lie a-dying, in fancy I shall go back to and visit them; I shall look with clear eyes on the purple brow of the hills, hear the running silver babble of the brook, and the trill of the nightingale will come to me out of the heart of the silence. . . .

CHAPTER XIV.

»Love all, trust a few,

Do wrong to none; be able for thine enemy,
Rather in power than use; and keep thy friend
Under thy own life's key; be checked for silence,
But never taxed for speech.«

A NEW era in my existence has begun. All my life long I have hated petticoats, and longed for trousers as hopelessly as an old maid of sixty sighs for a sweetheart; and now, lo! and behold, Providence, who so rarely grants to any human being his heart's desire, drops them at my feet, and any day I may step into them, and enjoy the exquisite satisfaction of not only feeling a boy, but looking one. Upstairs, in my box, lie two simple garments never yet worn, but which I may be called upon to don at any moment. Perhaps this very afternoon the summons may come, and I shall cast my encumbrances to the winds, and for once feel like Jack. If he could only see me! On the whole, though, I am rather glad he cannot, for I know he would laugh, and I have a sneaking conviction that my *tout ensemble* in my new gear is more likely

to provoke derision than admiration. But oh, it is so comfortable! I have put it on behind my drawn curtain over and over again, for no earthly reason but to assure my eyes and touch that I am not dreaming, and that it is my very own, made for me.

We are all at work in the school-room, toiling at »seam, gusset, and band«, and envying heartily the blackbird who is free as air, and knows it, singing at his ease as he swings on the apple bough that looks in at the tall narrow window! The sunbeams dance and flicker on the dull school-books impudently, saying, as plain as they can speak, »We can play hide-and-seek all day if we please; we are not answerable to any one, and we have no lessons to learn or work to do.«

Steps come down the corridor; no mincing feminine ones this time, but a man's bold, decided tread. I lay down my stitching to listen. The door opens, a head is popped in. »Cricket!« says a voice like a trumpet, the door is shut again, and down go work and thimbles, a Babel of delighted cries burst forth, and in thirty seconds the room is cleared, and we are all upstairs, pulling off ribbons, gowns, crinolines, all our feminine belongings, and pulling on knickerbockers and

blouses! Yes, *knickerbockers*! Let no one blush or look shocked, for they are long and ample, and tied modestly in at the ankle; and as to the blouse, which descends below the knee, and is trimly belted in at the waist, it is as decent and uncompromising as that worn by Dr. Mary Walker; our costume being in short nothing more or less than that which is designated by the somewhat opprobrious title of »Bloomer«. The knickerbockers bring comfort, the tunic confers respectability. It is a lovely thought that I can kick up my heels to my heart's content, and yet preserve decorum. As to what manner of female I look, I care nothing; my feelings are all I think about, and they are blissful. I feel as light as a feather, and equal to Jack at running, vaulting, or hurdle jumping.

On my way downstairs I fall in with the girls—shrunk, insignificant creatures, measured by the standard of half an hour ago, when they boasted a circumference of from four to five yards of petticoat. They even look meek; for it is a fact that a large portion of a woman's assurance lies in her tail. Shear her of that, and she is in no way superior to man. Out in the cricket field I scan the assemblage critically, and nothing but

the consciousness of looking a greater guy than any one present, prevents me from going off into a fit of convulsive laughter. If only Charles Lovelace, George Tempest, or Jack could see us!

We have roly-poly girls and bean-stalk girls, little girls, big girls, long girls, short girls; girls whose plump proportions fit their garments as closely as a kernel fits a shell; girls whose garments hang upon them loose, as did the armour on Don Quixote's gaunt form; girls who waddle, amble, jig, trot, hurry, and stride—their action plainly showed in the narrow, straight costume. Can an English girl walk? I trow not. It is a pity the time spent in needlework is not used in drilling. Conspicuous, even among this remarkable throng, is the German governess, short, square, stout, not over young, with large flat face, enormous feet and hands, and that general look of a Dutch doll that usually marks the Teutonic race. She wears the regulation trousers and blouse; but whether under an impression that she is not sufficiently clad, or whether she wishes to give a full dress air to a somewhat severe costume I know not; at any rate, she has over and above arrayed herself in a very large, ample, white muslin jacket, profusely frilled and starched, and tightly belted

in at the waist, and these frills set straight out from her sturdy form in a fashion that would bring a smile to the face of a crocodile.

The wickets are pitched; the ball is flying from hand to hand; we are all waiting for Mr. Russell, the man who introduced the game of cricket at Charteris, or rather, made it an institution, for it has flourished many years, and many a pretty young mother makes an excellent long-stop or field to her sons, thanks to the training she received at school. To Mr. Russell, therefore, be our eternal thanks due, in that he has, for a time at least, emancipated us from the slavish thralldom of our petticoats, and enabled us to stretch our limbs and use them. He is coming over the grass from the school with Miss Tyburn now; tall, erect, a little grey, his dress showing but little of the clergyman about it (He is one of the committee, and owns »The Charteris«, the only big house in the place. His grandfather built these schools.) How my heart leaps as I look at him. Why did he not come home sooner? His daughter is with him. And now sides are being chosen, the game begins, and as my side is in, I have no opportunity for making myself look ridiculous as yet, I merely look on.

It is a droll sight to see a girl walk up to the wicket and send her ball in, if not as powerfully as a man, well nigh as straight; and to see another standing, bat in hand, with body slightly bent forward, awaiting it. Mr. Russell is against us, and in the next over his fast, round-arm bowling gives me an uneasy sense of fear, the ball hurtles along so swiftly, that surely a slender ankle or arm might snap like sealing-wax at its onslaught; and something of that Frenchman's astonishment comes into my mind who could not conceive the reason of Englishmen being so fond of cricket, for where was the pleasure of standing up in a hot sun for a man to shy a hard ball at you, while a lot of other fellows stood round and looked on? If I do come to grief I hope that any amount of arms and legs will be broken, but not my teeth. I never could stand false ones, and I could not do without any, so it would be awkward.

How hot it is! We are all sitting and lying about under the trees; a little farther off are Miss Tyburn and Mr. Frere, who has just come over from the parsonage. In common mercy to our numbers he ought to play, and allow us to enjoy the distinction of having a man on each side; but apparently he is more careful of his shins than

ambitious of honour, so sits in the shade at his ease, looking on. All too soon comes that terrible moment when »Helen Adair!« is called, and bat in hand, I walk forth to my fate. I begin my illustrious career by hit-wicket, but in consideration of my extreme greenness and inexperience am permitted to take my innings, that is to say, if I can get it. The ground flies up into my face, the sky lies at my feet, as I stand awaiting my first ball, holding with stiff nervous fingers my bat, in what may be called the »first position« of cricketers—bolt upright, with my person carefully curved out, and away from it, like Cupid's bow. In comes the ball, and I swipe wildly at it. Have I hit it or the wickets, or the wicket-keeper, or myself? I am still in doubt and undecided as to whether I ought to walk off to the shade of the friendly tree when another ball comes creeping in, very insidiously this time, and somehow I give it a neat little tip that sends it straight into Fräulein's face; and while I am looking all about, and marvelling where it has got to, she is led away, weeping bitterly, with a bleeding nose. Quite overpowered by this proof of my skill, I send the next ball, which somehow seems to run of its own accord against my bat, a tolerable distance; and

being pleased at the circumstance, and engaged in looking round with a modest smirk for admiration, am amazed at being violently hustled by my fellow batswoman, who wildly exhorts me to *run*. Ah! I had forgotten all about the runs, I was too much taken up in congratulating myself, but I set out with a will, and am considerably taken aback on arriving at my bourne to find that I am ignominiously run out.

Moral: stick to business. Back to the tree I go, as crest-fallen, miserable, and ashamed a lass as the world contains. As I am seating myself disconsolately, Miss Tyburn calls me, and I jump up to obey her bidding.

»Mr. Frere knows your father, Helen Adair,« she says; »he would like to talk to you,« and she rises and sails away towards the house, for which I am thankful. How could I talk to any one before her?

»And so you are Alan Adair's daughter?« says Mr. Frere, stretching out a kind hand; »and I never found it out until to-day.«

»I knew *you*, sir,« I say, nodding. »I have seen you hanging up in the library, you know.«

»Has your father still that old likeness?« he asks, smiling.

»Oh, yes! Were you and papa very great friends, sir?»

»Not very,« he says, smiling again; »what made you think so?»

»He does not keep photographs or—or pictures, generally.«

»I knew him when we were both young men at Silverbridge.«

»At Silverbridge!« I exclaim, my eyes sparkling. »You know my old home, then?»

»Yes, but your father was not married then. I suppose he has several children by this time?»

»A few, sir; *twelve*.«

»Twelve!« he repeats, starting back. »You are joking?»

»No, it is quite true! and goodness knows—for I'm sure we don't—whether there won't be as many more! At home there is always a baby, and they mount up, you know.«

»And I have not *one*!« he says in a voice that is cheerful, and yet has a faint undertone of regret.

»Oh! you need not wish you had any!« I say, shaking my head: »you would never be able to

keep them in order—never. Papa often says that if he had his time over again he would not have half so many! And I am sure,« I continue, looking at his kindly gentle face, »that you would never have the heart to whip——«

»And does your father?« he asks, laughing.

»*Rather!* Only ask the fry! Shall you be likely to go to Silverbridge soon?« I ask suddenly and apprehensively.

»Not in the least. Why?«

»You might tell papa I was naughty or—or something.«

»I never tell tales,« he says. »And now do you think Miss Tyburn would allow you to come over to the parsonage sometimes and make tea for me?«

»Delightful!« I say, clapping my hands. »Oh! it will be so nice to get away from all these girls sometimes! They are all very well, sir, but I prefer *boys*.«

»I expect a nephew in a few days, but he is not a boy unfortunately.«

»Will he play cricket with us?« I ask with interest; »one black coat does look so lost among all these girls!«

»I am afraid Miss Tyburn would object,« says Mr. Frere, laughing again (really he is not a bit like most elderly gentlemen); »he is coming for some shooting a friend has placed at his disposal near here. I shall not see much of him.«

»Is he nice, sir?«

»I think so.«

»Helen Adair! Helen Adair!« echoes on all sides. The time has come for me to field. Surely I cannot distinguish myself as lamentably in that duty as I did in the other? »Good-bye!« I say in a violent hurry. »Good-bye! But before I go I want to tell you that I like you *very much indeed!*«

By-and-by I am able to do my side some small service. Mr. Russell is in, and batting away with a determination and vigour that strikes consternation to our feminine souls, and presently he sends a mighty ball straight over my head (who am standing long field on) straight across the cricket-field and into the next. »Six!« cry the Russellites; but six it shall not be, if I can help it. Laying my legs to the ground with a will, I have cleared the field and leaped the hedge beyond, before he has got *one*. I go plump into the midst of a stinging-nettle bed—but that is nothing, I espy the

ball and send it home with all my might. And after all he only gets two. He casts an approving glance on me as I return, evidently he is not used to seeing girls jump, if he only knew how thoroughly Jack has grounded me in that doubtful accomplishment!

CHAPTER XV.

»Beauty's ensign yet,
Is crimson on thy lips and in thy cheeks,
And death's pale flag is not advanced there.«

It is three o'clock on Saturday afternoon, and I am making my toilette preparatory to setting out for the parsonage. I would rather be playing cricket, but Mr. Russell, after giving us a glorious week, has gone away again, however he is coming back, and the sooner the better, say I. Meanwhile, let me arrange my clean and crackling gown as gracefully as the inequalities of my form permit, and try and persuade my curly thick hair to lie flat.

»Good-bye, Mary,« I say, putting my head in at the class-room door, where she sits illuminating a text, »I'm going now.«

I never did care about girls, or want to be great friends with any of them, but I like Mary.

The parsonage is only a few yards away; it is right before my eyes as I walk along the bit of road that divides it from the school. As I lift

the latch of the gate, and go through the old-fashioned, sweet-smelling garden, I give a long sigh of content, it is all so peaceful, so dainty, so still. There is a faint suspicion of magnolia in the hall, a scent of roses abroad; and when Mr. Frere himself comes out to greet me, I feel blessedly, delightedly, restfully happy.

»Run upstairs and take off your things, my dear,« he says, and Mrs. Pim, his housekeeper, shows me the way.

Coming down again, I find that he has vanished, but she pushes open the door of a room on the left, and I enter.

It is low and wite, like our Silverbridge rooms, and it is orderly and prim as an old maid's parlour, with great formal bowls of flowers planted about it, and a stiff bean-pot set in the hearth-place. The windows are open, and, though it is September, the late roses nod in at the windows. A big deep arm-chair is pulled up to one of them with its back turned to me; approaching to seat myself in it, for a long course of upright chair backs has made me hanker very seriously after something easy, I see the crown of a dark smooth head resting against it. I am about to take a peep round the corner to see who it can be, when the occupant

of the chair rises, stretches himself, and opens his mouth for a yawn, stopping midway as he describes *me*.

»I beg your pardon,« he says, shutting his mouth with a snap, »I never heard you come in.«

»You are Mr. Frere's nephew,« I say, sitting down on the edge of a sofa, and looking at him, »why are you not out shooting?«

»I have been out all the morning. How do you know I am Mr. Frere's nephew?«

»There is no one in Charteris,« I say, shaking my head; »no one ever comes here, except to see the girls, or Miss Tyburn, or Mr. Russell.«

»And are you one of the girls?«

»Of course.«

»The biggest of them?«

»Oh no! but there are much smaller ones than me. Do you think me so very little? At home, at Silverbridge, you know, they always thought me so *leggy*.«

»You will shoot up some day,« he says, passing his hand over his moustache, »perhaps be a giantess, who knows? And do you really live at Silverbridge?«

»Yes. I suppose you have heard a good deal about it from Mr. Frere?«

»I was born there,« he says.

»But you have not been there lately?«

»I lived there until fifteen years ago. Have you never been to The Towers?«

»Yes, I have been there,« I say slowly, remembering certain stolen afternoons spent under the shadow of the oaks in the grand old park; »and that is yours?«

»Yes, it is mine. My father died in Rome last year.«

I don't think that Jack and I ever knew who it was that owned The Towers, not that we should ever have been any the wiser if we had heard the name.

»No. I went away before you were born.«

»And yet you cannot be very old,« I say, lifting my eyes to the dark, proud, somewhat worn face, that is as far removed from mere effeminate beauty as it is from ordinary every-day looks.

»Old enough!« he says, with something very like a sigh; »I am thirty years old!«

»More than double my age,« I say soberly. »Oh! it seems a great deal; but then you must have seen so much, been all about the world; it must be nice to have had experience.«

»I would give it all,« he says, looking into my

eager face, »to have your youth and freshness and *belief*.«

»Belief!« I repeat, »what is that?»

»I can hardly tell you,« he says, »for you would not understand. Do you not look forward to having your life all your own way, meeting with the men and women you think heroic, having your ups and downs, certainly, but also your rewards and pleasantnesses? I did when I was your age.«

»And why should I not?« I ask puzzled; »are all our hopes of future happiness illusions? I should hate to think that.«

»Do not think it, then,« he says, standing up with a quick impatient shake of the shoulders; »let us go out into the garden. By the way, what am I to call you, little madam?»

»Helen Adair,« I say, laughing; »at home they call me Nell.«

»Then I shall call you Nell, too,« he says promptly. »I wonder where my uncle is?»

He goes to a door leading into a small inner room, that is, I think, Mr. Frere's study, but he is not there.

»Sent for to some old woman who thinks she

is dying, I suppose,« says his nephew; »he is always being imposed upon.«

We go out into the kitchen garden, which is not close locked as ours at home, but open to all comers; and since there are no little thieves here to make busy work among the fruit, there is plenty and to spare.

»You are as good as a pair of steps,« I say, watching him with much interest gathering the pears that grow on the sunny side of the wall; »how useful you would have been at Silverbridge!« He gives me a satin smooth Marie Louise. How I wish Jack was here!

»And of what use should I have been?«

»You could have jumped the wall and thrown the fruit over to us.«

»And supposing it was breakable?«

»We should not have minded,« I say, laughing. »Have you a first-rate kitchen garden at The Towers?«

»We used to have, I don't know whether the raspberry and gooseberry bushes have grown, like me, aged.«

»I do so love gooseberries,« I say, looking fondly at the bare bushes we are passing; »grapes never came up to them in my estimation.«

»Then when I am at The Towers will you come and help strip my bushes?«

»That I will,« I say heartily, »only I am afraid that if you once let me into your garden, you would never get any dessert.«

»I shall not want any for a long time; I am not going there for three years, except for a day or two to arrange matters.«

»Three years!« I say blankly. »Oh dear! I shall be past gooseberries by the time you come back!«

»There will be the peaches?«

»Yes, but they will never taste the same, you know, after I am grown up. Are you going very far?«

»To India, America, Siberia, Australia, China, and—I forget the names of the places almost.«

»It is a pity,« I say, shaking my head, »a very great pity! You should do a little at a time. You cannot enjoy all that at once! Why, when we went to Periwinkle-by-the-Sea we were worn out with the novelties. We felt they were almost too much!«

»But supposing,« he says, with a queer look upon his face, »that you wanted to be worn out, wanted to tire yourself, what then?«

»I never felt like that,« I say thoughtfully, »so I cannot tell.«

»You have a blessedly blank memory, child,« he says; »would to God I had!«

»My master is expecting you,« says Mrs. Pim, appearing suddenly before us, so we go in and have dinner; a cool, quiet repast that is very unlike the one of which I partook at one o'clock to-day. I think Mr. Frere is fond of this nephew; Paul, he calls him, his other name, I find, is *Vasher*. We are out in the garden again by seven o'clock—at so primitive an hour does Mr. Frere dine—and smelling at the roses, the carnations, and those sweet last gifts that summer leaves behind when she sweeps her bright skirts away to make room for autumn, and I have gathered me a nosegay at Mr. Frere's request, and am tying it together with a wisp of dry grass. We have wandered to the gate that gives on the road, and while Mr. Vasher smokes his cigar, and Mr. Frere talks from time to time, we watch the cows go past, making all the air »like the sweet south, that breathes upon a bank of violets«, and half a dozen labourers, and a tipsy man; for, strange to say, even in this out of the world corner people are as much inclined to be wicked as anywhere else. Mr. Frere

has his eyes fixed on the portals of the shining city, through which the sun seems to have only just passed; his face is grave; perhaps he is thinking of the gold and silver and jewels of his youth that are stored away there, to be given back to him by God's hand maybe, when this life is over past. Mr. Vasher's face is so calm and still and indifferent as he leans over the gate, blowing a smoke wreath up into the clear blue azure above us, that I inly marvel whether he were not joking a while ago when he spoke as though the past had proved more bitter than sweet to him.

The sound of hoofs strikes sharply upon my ears; looking up I see a horsewoman approaching at a foot pace, her head is bent, the reins are hanging loosely from her hand, her face is almost hidden. At my side I feel a sudden leap, a stir, and a hoarse voice, deep and shaken, says below its breath, »My God!« — turning, I see Paul Vasher's face convulsed by love, hate, scorn, longing, loathing . . . which is it of all these feelings that possesses and shakes him? I look at the girl, she is riding slowly by; she has not lifted her head or moved one hair's breadth. I feel rather than hear the sigh of relief he gives (surely it is relief?)

when she lifts her eyes, looks full in his face, then, it is all in a moment, the reins slip from her hands, she sways and falls headlong to the earth. She does not touch it though, for Paul Vasher has leapt the gate, has caught her in his arms, and is looking down on her with a strange expression, while the groom hastily dismounts and catches his mistress's horse.

»Bring her in!« says Mr. Frere, pale with alarm. (Are not old bachelors and old maids easily daunted?) And Paul brings her in, and lays her down in the big arm-chair, in which I found him sitting a few hours ago. I do not think she has fainted, but her eyes are shut, and she makes neither sigh nor moan, nor does she stir hand or foot. As I look at her, I hold my breath for wonder at her. Well might Shakespeare have said of her, »for the poor rude world hath not her fellow.« She is all white and gold, like a pure lily, and as tall; for though her little hands and feet might belong to a child, she is really of fair stature, and so softly, sensuously lovely at all points, in every dimple and curve of cheek, lip, chin, and body, that it is a feast of the eye to look upon her, while—

»Here in her hair

The painter plays the spider, and hath woven
A golden mesh to entrap the hearts of men
Faster than gnats in cobwebs.«

Once I look at Mr. Vasher, then back again at her, for the face fascinates me. I do not like it, but oh! I love to look at what is rare and unusual; and is not this such a picture as a man might dream of, and sigh after, all his life long and never see? Mrs. Pim is trying to pour brandy down her throat, but the beautiful mouth does not unclose, the fast set teeth do not unlock, and yet somehow she does not give me the idea of being an insensible woman. I am thinking this, when she opens her eyes with a long-drawn, shuddering sigh, and looks about her, first at one, then another. She does not see Paul, who is standing behind her.

»I hope you are better,« says Mr. Frere, advancing, and looking at her very kindly. »We were afraid——«

»I thought,« she says, glancing about with dilated sapphire blue eyes, »that I saw——«

Paul steps forward out of the shadow. »I am here,« he says quietly. »I hope you have received no hurt?«

I had thought these two were lovers, but they

cannot be: his voice is as cold and indifferent as though he were speaking to Pim. She looks up at him, and her lips quiver, like a beautiful child that seeks love and is given a blow; under the look he winces and turns away. She is very young, not more than eighteen, I think; and somehow, down in my heart, though why or wherefore I cannot tell, I am sorry for her.

»My dear,« says good Mr. Frere, »are you sure that you are quite recovered!«

»Quite!« she says, standing up and giving him such a bright, winsome smile, that the middle-aged man blushes up to his ears, pleased as any schoolboy. »I must have been very careless, for Dandy never gave me a fall before.«

»It is fortunate we were at the gate,« he says, »and that my nephew was able to be of some assistance.«

»Your nephew!« she says, staring at him; »is Paul Vasher your nephew?«

»You know him?« exclaims Mr. Frere. »My dear boy, why did you not tell me so?«

»We have met before,« she says, looking at Paul; »that is all.«

»I beg your pardon,« says Paul, coming forward. »Allow me, Miss Fleming, to introduce my uncle,

Mr. Frere, to you. This young lady, sir, is Miss Fleming.«

»Lady Flytton's niece?« asks Mr. Frere, as the girl lays her lovely slim hand in his; »then we are near neighbours!«

»I have heard my aunt speak of you,« she says gently, »and we were coming to hear you preach to-morrow.«

»And you know Paul?« continues Mr. Frere; »how very odd! I suppose you did not know he was in this part of the world?«

»I thought he was in Scotland.«

»You said you were going to Scarbro',« says Paul, »you changed your mind?«

»Yes, like you. It is not a difficult thing to do, to change one's mind, is it?«

Their eyes meet; ay, these two were hot lovers once, but what are they now?

»You have laid me under a great obligation, Mr. Vasher,« she says, in her proud young voice. »Pray understand that I am grateful. Good-night, Mr. Frere, and forgive me, if you can, for starting you so much!«

»Good-night! good-night!« he says, and so with a hand-shake she goes, and the two men accompany her to the gate.

Now if Mr. Frere had possessed the most rudimental idea of his duty on this occasion, he would have stopped behind with me. Clearly he has about as much notion of being a gooseberry as a cabbage; but my instinct is active enough if his is not, and a long course of sympathy with Alice and Charles has made me very tender-hearted on the subject of lovers; so as Mr. Frere passes the window with the two young people, I utter a dismal groan and call out to him that I have tumbled down and hurt myself very much. Back he comes in a twinkling and finds me nursing my leg on the floor, with a twisted ankle. »I tumbled over a footstool,« I explain, »and will you assist me to the sofa?« He wants to call Mrs. Pim, and have it examined; but this I object to, giving it as my opinion that rest is all that is required.

»So odd,« says the poor gentleman, as he brings me a book and some papers, »that there should be two accidents in one evening!«

On some pretext or another I keep him in the room for fully ten minutes; then he goes out into the garden after Paul.

I wonder if, when I am grown up and am quarrelling with my lover, if any good Samaritan

will take as much trouble to serve me as I have taken to serve those two who are standing down by the gate yonder, looking into each other's faces with such a different expression on each? So much I see as I hop nimbly to the window as soon as Mr. Frere's back is turned to me.

CHAPTER XVI.

HAMLET. I did love you once.

OPHELIA. Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.

»COME and pray! come and pray!« ring the sweet bells through the hushed peace of the sabbath morning; and obedient to the call we rise up, and, ascending to the higher regions, proceed to cloak and bonnet ourselves after our school-girl lights and abilities. There must be a little fashion wandering about the world somewhere, but it has not yet found its way to Charteris; only in one respect do we follow the mode, and that is by wearing spoon bonnets. Very fresh and fair look some of the faces inside those absurd monstrosities, but unlovely folk are not improved by their shape, and of those hapless latter virgins I am one. I would not mind if the tiresome thing would keep straight; but it will not, and I usually reach church looking as though I had had a fight on the way and come off second best. I am in short frocks still, so that from a distance I look all legs and

bonnet—»like a windmill«, as one of my friends kindly remarked the other day.

We are out in the road now, winding along it like a dingy riband, and as we pass the parsonage, Mr. Vasher comes out, fresh, perfectly dressed, with a delicate button-hole in his coat; altogether a pleasant and refreshing sight among this regiment of indifferently clothed young women. He scans our ranks as carelessly as though we were a show of azaleas or roses (not that we are those pretty flowers by any means—far more dandelions than beauty-blossoms grow in our parterre), and does not discover me; apparently my bonnet is as good a disguise as an entirely new body. He has passed us all, with his long, quick step, long before we turn in at the churchyard. I wonder why a black coat on any man's back who is not fifty sends such a twitter of excitement through a girls' school? A few years hence and a hundred men would not cause the excitement that a single one does now in the breast of a school-girl. And now we are in church; anon Mr. Frere is in his place, and »Dearly beloved« is half through, when a prodigious clatter outside makes all eyes turn to the door. A hand and arm coated in grey and scarlet livery open it, and a tall, fair, majestic woman sails

in and rustles up the aisle, her bracelets clanking, her dress trailing behind her, looking uncommonly like a ship in full sail. Miss Fleming follows. She does not rustle and she does not clank; she sweeps noiselessly along in her cool white dress, and she is in white from head to foot. The very church seems the brighter for her coming, as she kneels against the carven oak; she looks as sinless, and fair, and adorable as Marguerite may have looked before Faust came, and yet—and yet—I wonder why with this lovely bit of porcelain I am always thinking of the outside, never of the nature and inner life? For the best of reasons: save for beauty her face is the merest blank; if she has a soul she keeps it mighty well hid, but in the teeth of such perfection who would ask anything more? No sensible man or woman. It is a pity to look at the mother and daughter side by side. Will the lovely red and white of the girl's cheek strengthen into the fixed colour that the other wears? Will the dainty contour of brow, lip, and chin in the daughter's face become thickened, even lost in time, as in the mother's case? They are so alike in features, colouring, and proportion, that the doubt is natural. Paul Vasher sits in the chancel opposite me, the Flemings a little below in the

body of the church; once he turns his head, and their eyes meet, and are held fast and long. It is a difficult look to read, but, though no change passes over his face,

»Makes her blood look out:

Good sooth she is the queen of curds and cream.«

Now the Benediction is spoken, and we rise and go our ways, standing aside in the road as Lady Flytton's carriage goes by. The girls are buzzing in low tones of the stranger, of her beauty, her bonnet, her gown; she has even astonished them into forgetting Mr. Vasher. We have dinner, that liberal meal at Charteris, that does not stand god-mother to resurrection pies, cold remains, and potato puddings, or any other abomination. Our parents pay for us to be well fed, and we *are*; therefore the school prospers. We are in the first class-room now, and—oh, wonder!—I am actually seated in the midst of the potent Buffs; for so the six head girls of the school are called, who wield an authority in the school second only to that of Miss Tyburn. By no virtue of my own am I here, but Kate Lishaw, the head of them, has been pleased to take some small notice of me; therefore am I sitting cheek by jowl with my betters.

»Girls,« says Kate, resting her charming dark-

eyed *mignonne* face on her clasped hands, »I have some news; we are going to have a *party*.«

»Not really?« »How I hate them!« »A lot of trouble for nothing!« »We shall get some supper, though!« »And there will be at least *one* man!« »He won't be asked.« These ejaculations burst out on all sides, I alone holding my tongue, for as yet a party at Charteris is a thing heard of but never seen by me.

»It is even so, my brethren,« continues Kate, »and the edict has gone forth that our quarterly, low-necked, manless, partnerless, full dress ball is to take place on Thursday week. But do not be down-hearted, my friends, about this impending festivity; there is an unusual and beautiful halo of novelty, for at it will probably be present—a *man*! None of your miserable old rectors or half-penny hobbledehoys, but a downright well-dressed, presentable man. There is no knowing to whom he may throw his pocket-handkerchief; therefore my advice to all and sundry is, curl up your hair, starch up your skirts, put on your most ravishing ogle, your finest languish, and—every man for himself and devil take the hindmost.«

»Only he cannot dance with more than a quarter of us,« says Laura Fielding, a languid beauty of

the Lydia Languish type, who is ripe for flirtation but doomed to bread and butter.

»I have thought of that,« says Kate; »we will have a lottery with fifteen prizes, and whoever draws one shall pin it to the front of her dress, and walk up to Mr. Vasher, and making a curtsy say, '*My* dance, I think?' and then lead him away.«

»I wonder what he would be doing all that time?« says Belle Linden. »He does not look like a man who would be made to do anything he does not choose.«

»So much the better,« says Dora; »I don't fancy the *coup d'œil* of our assembled charms will have the same effect upon him that they had on that little man who came to our last with Mr. Russell, and who gave one look at our hungry and awaiting ranks *and ran*.«

»Where did he go?« I ask, speaking for the first time.

»Nobody knows. Of one thing only are we certain, he never came back here.«

»Perhaps Mr. Vasher will not come,« says Kate; »men like girls, you know, but, I fancy, in moderation. He does not look like an universal lover of womankind—we want a diffusive man.«

»If he does not come,« says Belle, »to view

our forlorn and piteous gambols, then all spring and *verve* will depart therefrom, and we shall be like apple tart without the apples.«

»If he only knew,« says Emma, »that every petticoat, skirt, and tucker in this establishment will be washed to his glory, he could not choose but come. He could not be man born of woman without feeling touched.«

»Helen Adair, you shrimp! you have spoken to him, have you not?« asks Laura. »Is he made of gentle stuff or likely to kick over the traces?«

»I don't know,« I say, laughing; »shall I ask him when I see him?«

»Do,« says Kate impressively, laying her hand on my head; »go down on your knees to him, and refuse to get up again until he says he will come! There will be a *ragged* look about us all if he does not!«

A bell ringing in the distance calls us together like a flock of sheep, to go out for a walk.

It is Wednesday afternoon, and we are all, great and small, upstairs unearthing our evening dresses and fishing up boots, gloves, and other minor appendages. To me this party is a brand novelty. Never have I been to anything that bore the most ghostly resemblance to one; therefore

my festive garment is not, like that belonging to some of my less fortunate school-mates, grown too short, too tight, or too narrow. Nevertheless it is not much to boast of, being a species of Phoenix revived from the ashes of one of mother's dead and gone tails. It is rusty, it is musty, it is villainously bare of ornament and green of hue, but it comes decently down to my heels, and does not refuse to meet over my chest—a piece of good luck on which I may congratulate myself, seeing that on all sides I hear the popping of hooks and bursting of buttons, as »bodies« after undue pressure fly off at a tangent, and gape widely when they should close; while petticoats, that ought modestly to touch the ground, display ankles that refuse to blush unseen——

The woes of one girl in particular might draw tears from a stone. Poor Emma's existence is one long struggle to get into her frocks; for Providence, who ever loves to serve mankind nasty tricks, has predisposed her to fat, with an ever-increasing solidity that sets dressmakers at defiance. Not that this fact in itself calls for pity; for are not the fat ones of the earth the happiest, the cheerfullest, the best tempered people living? The sting of it lies in this, that Emma has a stepmother who objects

to new dresses on principle, and will allow no more than a certain number a year, and has decreed that when she has had those let out to their extremest limits, if they will not accommodate themselves to her form, then her form must be brought down to the size of her gown. So, when poor Emma shows signs of overgrowing, she is put on Banting, and made to eat the things that she hates and leave untouched those that she loves, and, over and above, to skip for an hour before breakfast every morning. The latter in hot weather is trying, but, nevertheless, she works her stepmother's will; and though her life is a burden to her, by degrees her fat diminishes, and she comes down to the size of her garments. If this is not a practical example of the triumph of mind over matter, then where shall one be found? Just now she is in the increasing stage, and efforts that would not disgrace a blacksmith are being made to »fasten« her low blue and white silk frock; but, alas! until Emma has returned to Banting the glories of that frock are not for her!

Consultations, serious and profound as those held with a court dressmaker over a London beauty's first Drawing-room, are going on in all directions; baréges, grenadines, and muslins being the aristo-

cratic subjects under discussion. It seems a great waste of good starch and time, so much preparation, so little to gain by it. But though no strangers worth mentioning will be present to appraise all this bravery at its true worth, will it not be something for Rose Mary with her superior flounces to cut out Anna Maria with her scanty ones, and are not the merits of the rival beauties of the school on these occasions of dress parade afterwards discussed as fully and exhaustively as any Almack beauty, by any group of beaux and wits at White's? Hence these puckered brows and weighty discussions.

I hang up my black bombazine to try and get some of the creases out; then I dig out a pair of very large, very baggy old white kid boots, at least four sizes too big for me—family heirlooms that were originally worn (I think) by my grandmother, then by mother, now by me, and will be handed down in turn to future generations. They are as yellow as autumn leaves; surely their complexion might be improved? Not unlikely! So might my own, so might the bombazine's, by upsetting a pot of ink over it. It would then at least be black; but I am not going to take the trouble.

I put my bat under my arm and go downstairs with a pleased smile on my face, for am I not going to clean it, and is not this duty a real labour of love with me? But half-way down I meet a servant, who says—

»If you please, miss, you may put on your hat and go over to the parsonage, Miss Tyburn says.«

I put away my bat and fetch my hat, nothing loth, and set out immediately. Arrived at the house, I find no one visible, but after some search discover Mr. Vasher in the orchard, swinging in a hammock under an apple-tree. Very cool and lazy and comfortable he looks, with the September sun glinting through the green leaves, and on the sides of the rosy apples that hang over his head; though I fancy a smart shower of them upon his face would not improve the flavour of his »Balzac«. He looks rather astonished as my head suddenly appears at his elbow, and lays down his book.

»How do you do?« I say quickly. »Do not try to shake hands, you will only tumble out; I have come to ask you something very particular.«

»Well, what is it?«

»You like to do kind things, do you not? You like to please people?«

»That depends on who they are.«

»Oh, these are rather nice,« I say, nodding;
»they can't help being only girls, you know.«

»Oh! girls,« says Mr. Vasher; »and how can I please them?«

»We are going to have a party,« I say, seriously, »and you are going to be invited, and the Buffs were talking about it on Sunday, taking it as a matter of course that you would come; but somehow I felt in my bones that it was not the sort of thing you would care about, and I made up my mind to ask you to come as a great favour to us all.«

»And why did you think I should not come?« he asks, amusedly.

»Because,« I say, confidentially, »I know that, as a rule, men do not care for girls in a lump; they do not mind a few, but they can't stand *fifty*.«

»Only fifty? I thought I saw over a hundred on Sunday.«

»Oh no!« I say, laughing; »do not make us out worse than we are. And so—and so I thought I would just tell you how anxious we are for you to come, because I thought that, however much you disliked the idea, you would come as a matter of duty.«

»You must think me a good-tempered sort of fellow,« says Mr. Vasher, scrambling out of his hammock somewhat inelegantly (the handsomest man alive could hardly perform that feat gracefully); »before I promise, tell me what my duties will be.«

»There will be fifty girls,« I say, walking by his side, »without teachers, and you will have them all to yourself to pick and choose from, and you need not hurry yourself in the least about a partner, or be afraid of any one saying No, for you will be the only young man there.«

»Delightful privilege!« says my companion.

»You will not be expected to dance with us all,« I say, reassuringly; »not more than fifteen at most! The other girls dance with each other.«

»And what are you going to do?«

»I never dance,« I say, shaking my head; »I have never learnt, and it is better not to make a spectacle of myself.«

»Then you will not dance with me?«

»Oh no!« I say, »I could not think of such a thing. Even if I knew, how I should be ashamed to deprive the other girls of you; I see you sometimes, you know, and they do not, and they would think it so *mean* of me!«

CHAPTER XVII.

»O thou weed,
Who art so lovely fair, and smell'st so sweet,
That the sense aches at thee.«

THURSDAY evening has arrived, and eight o'clock is striking. We are all assembled in the big dining-room, and our petticoats are so voluminous and our bodies so pranked forth, that, instead of fifty souls, we look as though we numbered two hundred at the very least. If a Frenchman were let loose among us, he would clasp his hands in speechless admiration at the amount of raw material before him, the fine eyes, the abundant hair, fair skins, and perfect teeth; but he would also deplore, from the bottom of his soul, our *chaus-sures*, *coiffures*, and choice of colours—he would lament the total absence of style, *tournure*, *chic*, whatever it may be called, that in England is so conspicuous by its absence, and, while he hankered after our red and white charms, would console himself with the recollection of his sallow spouse's matchless taste and costume, perfect in every detail.

We each have a little card, or at least everybody has but me, upon which are inscribed the partners selected for the dances, although it is an understood thing that if a man should miraculously appear and request the honour, the former engagement is to be considered null and void.

After all, we have not had a lottery on Paul Vasher's account, and he will be free to go where he lists, although I privately entertain very grave doubts whether he will trot out one-half of the damsels who confidently expect to be asked.

The door opens and our little music-master appears, followed by his son bearing a fiddle, out of which he will presently harrow up our souls with shrieks that might wake the dead.

Miss Tyburn comes in. She wears maize silk and black lace; very imposing she looks as she bends in answer to the crackling bows every one makes all round the room. And now enter the Rev. Thomas Shrubbs (rector of an adjacent parish) with his wife, who wears a blue gown and a green and gold cap. Their son follows, a dyspeptic, parboiled youth of eighteen, who looks like a beast led to the slaughter, and while he gazes fatuously about him, seems dimly to understand that he has fallen among thieves. We are not

proud, we school-girls; anything in the shape of a man is comely in our eyes, but we scorn to reckon this fat youth as a man, or anything approaching to one.

At a sign from Miss Tyburn the fiddle strikes up, the little music-master thumps at the piano, and a quadrille is formed. Mr. Shrubb leads out Miss Tyburn with tottering steps (at his time of life he ought to know better), his wife sinks into an easy chair; the fat boy advances a step, apparently meditating a plunge into the sea of white muslin before him, gasps, blinks, ruminates, thinks better of it, and finally sits down, puffing apoplectically. »Gentlemen« girls fetch out their lady partners, and lead them to their places.

»If there is anything I hate,« says Laura Fielding, as she sweeps her pale pink skirts over my feet, »it is having a girl's arm round my waist!«

The room is one struggling mass of tarlatane, muslin, and barége; every now and then a hitch occurs, and half-a-dozen young women get firmly wedged together by their hoops, and are disentangled with great difficulty. In the ladies' chain, too, there is some confusion, but one can't expect everything. The old vicar sets, bows, and shuffles

with the rest most valiantly; like the Shaker of Artemus Ward memory. The dance over, every one who can sits down and drinks negus; which might be better, but then, on the other hand, might be worse. The fiddler is just executing a preparatory scrape that seems to take his hearers into the very bowels of the earth, when the door opens, and enter Mr. Frere and Mr. Vasher. As the latter stands talking to Miss Tyburn I see him glance about him with a keen amusement; then, as the music strikes up, he leaves her and comes straight to the corner where I lie *perdue*.

»This is our dance,« he says, placing my hand under his arm, disregarding my murmurs of dissent with masculine *sang-froid*.

I feel my shortcomings very grievously as he leads me forth. How I wish my gown were not so rusty, and that my boots did not curl up at the toes quite so much, seeming to require chains, as did those of our ancestors long ago. He puts his strong arm about my waist, and away we go; but, alas! if a lamp-post and a bottle elected to dance a jig together, they would bear about the same proportion to each other that Mr. Vasher does to me.

»Stop!« I cry, when we have taken one round and a half, »it is no good.«

So he stops, laughing, and takes me to a seat.

»Long and short,« he says, »and decidedly too much long!«

»I told you how it would be,« I say, ruefully; »you see, I am only a little above your elbow! If one could only roll one's self out!«

»Supposing you grew up like that?« he says, glancing almost imperceptibly at a maypole of a girl who is standing near, and who measures five feet ten in her stockings.

»One can always avenge one's injuries when one is that size; and, after all, must it not be nice to be able to snub people?« I say, laughing.

»That is a pretty little girl,« he says, looking at Kate Lishaw, who has paused for a moment in her dancing near us.

»She is a duck,« I say quickly; »do ask her to dance.«

In a moment I have fetched her, and they go off together, he looking with real admiration at her fresh, bright young face. I leave my place and go to the top of the room; hard by Miss Tyburn is speaking to Mrs. Shrubb, and as her

voice is raised in rivalry with the fiddle, I cannot avoid hearing what she says.

»Remarkably lovely; but you will be able to judge for yourself, she is coming to-night with her aunt, Lady Flytton. I was calling there yesterday, and happened to mention Mr. Vasher's name; she said she knew him very well, and seemed to like the idea of seeing him again, so I asked her to come.«

»Miss Fleming is coming! I wonder what Paul will say?«

The music ceases in a crescendo of shrieks that might well make Weber, whose waltz it is, stir in his coffin. The room is scarcely clear again when the door opens, and a little withered, bent old woman in a pearl grey satin, half covered with lace, totters in. Behind her comes her niece, Miss Fleming. More than ever like a white and gold lily does she look as she advances by the side of that brown old witch, and pays her *devoirs* to Miss Tyburn. She wears white garments that sweep in great, soft folds to the ground; they are bordered with a Greek pattern of gold, and about her neck, arms, and waist, are clasped heavy dead gold coins. She looks all white and gold, from the crown of her head to the tips of her em-

broidered *brodequins*. The scanty folds of the Greek bodice fall away exquisitely from the gleaming, ripe shoulders and bosom; the arms bare from shoulder to wrist taper divinely, and are softly nicked at elbow and wrist like a baby's. We all hold our breath as we look at her; and Paul Vasher, standing hard by, marks every matchless point of face and figure as no feminine eyes ever could, and—does not go near her. On the contrary, he says something to Kate, who leads him up to Mary Burns—comely, gentle, honest Mary—and she goes off with him, looking hugely flattered. Miss Fleming is seated in a low chair talking to Mrs. Shrubb, fanning herself slowly with a quaint fan of crimson feathers. The fat boy on seeing her has gasped once and never got his breath back. His father is sitting with a hand grasping each knee, surveying her with senile admiration. Why is not Mr. Vasher by her side? Why is she sitting there alone? She looks as though she did not care, and yet I am sure she does: not often can it fall to her lot to be slighted and set aside for school-girls.

He goes up to her by-and-by though, when the evening is wearing away; and surely she is not proud, for she lays her hand upon his arm,

and they waltz together, melting into the long gliding step that each possesses in such perfection. For a time I sit still and look at them, at the dark, magnificent looks of the man and the fair, luxuriant beauty of the girl, and think that never surely did a more splendid couple stand up together; they seem to be made for each other. Presently I leave my seat and go out into the corridor, which is bright as noon-day in the clear, pale beams of the September moon.

The hall door stands widely, invitingly open. Beyond its lintel lies the broad, sleeping, moon-washed earth, and down below—oh, so sweet!—gurgles up the glad notes of the nightingale. For a moment I hesitate—over that threshold I am forbidden to go; then, as the tread of many feet comes down the corridor, I snatch up one of the wraps lying about, and step forth into the silver peace and beauty of the night. Just outside the door is a dark corner, formed by the projection of the porch, and into this I slip, lest a teacher or Buff should come to the door and discover my unlawful whereabouts.

The flowers are all fast asleep; they look ghostly and weird in the glistening light. I wonder if they will wake up by-and-by, as Hans

Andersen's flowers did, and trip a dainty measure to the music the nightingale yonder furnishes? Somehow I never can believe that these flowers are but coloured shapes: they seem to me to be so much more worthy of souls and nerves than the ugly, stupid folks that walk about the world. There is not a breath of air abroad; the land is as still and unruffled as the dark blue vault overhead, in which the stars glitter countless and brilliant, as though a royal hand had strown them. We think queer thoughts sometimes, when we stand perfectly alone and in utter silence, face to face with the great mystery of nature: the common prosaic, every-day life falls from us, habit fades away, and custom is not; the thousand ways and word sand thoughts that lay as a screen between us and her great truths, vanish like thin air; the mortal coil does not press so heavily upon us at these times as at others, and some dim perception of the universal law that governs God's earth breathes itself imperceptibly into our souls.

I think I must have been out here a long while, for I am growing cold. Time to go in. I am just emerging, when, down the corridor click, clack! click, clack! come the tap of high-heeled shoes, and I hastily draw back into my corner as the

new-comer steps over the threshold and stands, face and form and robe, bathed in a flood of pure silvery light. It is Miss Fleming, and she stands quite motionless, looking up steadfastly at the sky overhead. All the soft beauty of her face is gone; in its place there reigns a cold, still determination, that contrasts almost violently with the youth of her lineaments. As she slowly lifts her arm and right hand to heaven, her lips move, and she looks like some relentless goddess, who had been turned to stone in the act of calling down confusion and curses upon her enemy. More footsteps—a man's this time—come down the passage and approach the door, pause for a moment, then come on again.

»Had you not better have a shawl, Miss Fleming?« inquires Mr. Vasher's voice. »You will take cold.«

At his polite, chill words she neither speaks nor stirs, neither turns nor looks; she stands motionless, with her eyes fixed upon the ground, looking with her straight brow and antique raiment like a Greek slave standing before her master. He looks at her with a keen, devouring scrutiny from head to foot, and turns to go. He is within the house, when she calls to him—

»*Paul!*«

»Do you want me?« he says, pausing; but she does not answer, and he comes back slowly and stands a little apart from her. »Is there anything more to be said between us?« he asks. »Is it not all finished—done with?«

»To you, perhaps,« she says; »but not to me—not while my life lasts!«

»You will forget,« he says, looking down with a dark and bitter frown; »you are young yet.«

»Have you forgotten?« she asks below her breath. »Do you find it so easy?«

»God knows!« he says, lifting his head and staring up at the sky, that is so »thick inlaid with patines of bright gold«. »Women can't feel things as men do.«

»Do they not?« she cries, with a fierce jangle in her sweet voice. »Have you forgotten that it is the one who sins, not the one who is sinned against, that suffers the most keenly? Do you think that, if it had been through your fault or folly I lost my happiness, I should have mourned half as heavily as I do now, knowing that it is *my own doing?*«

»Why did you do it?« he says, looking down on her with an infinite yearning in his eyes, an

infinite agony in his voice. »We could have been so happy, child.«

»You were too hard upon me,« she says, with a shuddering moan. »Any other man would have forgiven me if he had loved me.«

»And did not I love you?« he asks, quietly.

»You cast me off,« she says, lifting her lovely face to his; »I did not you.«

»I never loved, never wanted any woman but you,« he says, slowly. »I chose you out of the whole world for my wife. I would have worn you as my fairest honour, my priceless pearl; and how did you reward me?«

»I was never unfaithful to you,« she says, drearily. »If ever I did anything wrong it was before I knew you.«

»And there it was that you deceived me,« he says, with a heavy sigh. »You had seemed so pure, and honest, and true.«

»And so I was to you,« she says swiftly—»always true to you!«

»Heavens!« he says, throwing back his head with a quick, sudden gesture, »when I think of it all! It was much such a night as this three months ago—only three months, that you and I stood together in that garden—and I asked you

to be my wife, and you put your arms about my neck; and, as we stood together, your lover came towards us, and looked, first on one, then on another, and went away. You never said, 'That is my betrothed husband, whom I have kissed and betrayed, as I will kiss and betray you if I have the chance.' When he rode that steeple-chase next morning so madly, so recklessly, that all saw the goal he strove to reach was death, and a quarter of an hour later was carried back to his mother's carriage *dead*, did you feel no remorse—no sorrow? You gave no sign. You were shocked; but he might have been a common acquaintance, no more; only later, in looking over the poor lad's papers (for I was a friend of his mother's), I came upon a packet of your letters, and, you being my promised wife, I thought no shame of reading one.« He pauses, and she droops her head in the moonlight and shivers. Is she cold or shamed? »You know the story,« he says, wearily, »and how we parted. I loved you then; I love you now, but differently, and it is all over.«

»You love me,« she says, in her low, passionate voice, »and I—my God! do I not love *you*? And yet we are to live apart! *Must* it be so, beloved—must it be so?«

»It must be,« he says, very gently. »We can never be anything to each other—never any more!« She lifts her head, and the agony in her face shows clear and strong in the moonlight, as they stand looking at each other, she so surpassingly fair, he so lofty of stature and dark of face; it seems sad, unnatural, that they should suffer so. As she turns away he puts out his hand and draws her back. »Silvia,« he says hoarsely, and in the September evening he shivers like a reed, »I would have gone to the world's end rather than have met you here to-night. What evil fate has brought us together again so soon—so terribly soon? Since we parted I have been trying with all my strength of body and soul to forget you, and it seemed as though I were beginning to succeed; and now you have appeared before me, to dash my hard-won peace from my hand, and give me all the raging pain and misery over again. If I were differently made—if I could forget everything and love you in the old fashion, I would do it; but I cannot. . . . I love you still, but with the worse half of my heart, not the better. Something has gone from you in my eyes that will never come back. Though I married you I should have no respect for you; in my eyes you would be no more than a beautiful

toy. The old worship is dead, and it will never come back. And though you think you love me now, a woman who betrays one man will betray another; and it would not please me to see my wife's eyes roving among my friends in search of admiration.«

»I would have been faithful to you,« she says, very low.

»No, you would not,« he says, with a heavy sigh; »it is not in you to be true to any man. You only care for me because I am out of your reach. If I were your husband you would not rest till you had played me false.«

»And I have loved you so well, so well!« she says, with a sob, lifting the pale, lovely face that has so changed during the past minutes to his.

»God help us both!« he cries passionately, pale as she through his bronzed darkness. He takes the soft face between his two brown hands, and gazes into it eagerly, devouringly, as a man may look his last on his heart's delight, lying in the envious coffin that will by-and-by hide her from his sight for ever. »Kiss me once, love, before we part, and then pray God that on earth we may never meet again.«

She lays her arms, white as any lilies, about his brown throat; she lifts the beautiful lips, out of which all colour has fled, and kisses him—once. And he snatches her in his embrace, and kisses her, not once but many times, on lip and brow and shoulder, with a strength that seems to crush her. Then he sets her down abruptly, and strides away into the night, and the girl stands breathless, panting, with a deadly pallor upon her face, a wild agony in her eyes. »My love,« . . . she says, »my love.« . . . She puts her hand suddenly to her heart, as though a knife had struck her newly, then she turns and steps over the threshold.

CHAPTER XVIII.

»But mine and mine I loved, and mine I praised,
And mine that I was proud on; mine so much,
That I myself was to myself not mine
Valuing of her; why she—oh! she is fallen
Into a pit of ink, that the wide sea
Hath drops too few to wash her clean again.«

»*MOST* extraordinary!« says Laura Fielding, resting her chin on her hands and her elbows on her desk.
»He actually left his hat behind!«

»Does any one know what became of it?« asks Kate Lishaw.

»It was put in a bandbox,« says Dora, »and carried to the parsonage by a maid servant, who made him a curtsey and said, ‘I’ve brought you something as you dropped among our young ladies, sir!’«

»Nonsense!« says Kate; »but I must confess I am disappointed in him! After all he proved a very little more valiant than Mr. Russell’s friend! He is very nice though,« she adds, »and he dances splendidly.«

»He is magnificent,« says Belle. »Did you

ever see such shoulders or such a head? And then his style—unimpeachable!«

»His moustache is——,« says Laura, »it has that long, bold sweep that you never see on a plain man's face; and as to his eyes——«

»Bravo! Laura,« says Kate.

»He was a man—— You know the rest. I'll tell you one thing,« says Belle, »that I am sure of; that exquisite piece of white and gold, Miss Fleming, was at the bottom of his sudden departure; and I am certain that if they are not lovers now, they were once with a vengeance. They disappeared together that night. I would have reconnoitred, but was curveting in the Lancers. After that, you know, *he went*.«

»I should not mind being you, Helen Adair,« says Kate, patting me on the shoulder. »You do the visiting, while we all stay at home.«

I am sitting in my bonnet and jacket, awaiting the carriage that is to take me to Lady Flytton's.

»I don't want to go,« I say earnestly; »indeed I do not. Why Lady Flytton asked me I cannot think, for she did not know mother very well.«

»What it is to have so many friends!« says Belle; »I wish I had some!«

»And are you coming back on Monday, child?»

»Yes.«

»I wonder if Mr. Vasher will go there?» says Kate. »Keep your eyes open, Helen Adair, and tell us all you see when you come back. Hark! there is the carriage.«

We go out. Yes, there it is, and the spirited black horses, with their scarlet rosettes, look far more fitted for a drive in Hyde Park than to bowl along these country lanes.

»Good-bye! good-bye!« say the Buffs.

The footman puts in my portmanteau, and away I go, feeling like Cinderella without the beauty. It is a lovely day, but oh! I wish I had a companion, for it is dull sitting all alone behind those two gorgeous-backed men-servants. How invitingly the nuts nod their brown faces at me from the hedge! I should be happier walking in the road with Jack, free to pick them, than perched up here with nothing to do. I wonder if I dare ask one of those men to gather me some? I cannot call them, for I do not know their names, so I uplift my voice in a »hem!« which I deliver point blank at the middle of the footman's back.

»Did you speak, miss?« he asks, touching his hat and turning.

»A— not exactly,« I say; »but I want some of those nuts, can you pick them for me?«

»Certainly, miss,« and in another minute he is in the road, and scrambling up the hedge; his long coat hampers his legs, the powder flies from his hair to his shoulders, but he is a man »for a' that«; and finally, he brings me my nuts with an unruffled countenance. I fancy I hear him saying later in the servants' hall, »She's low, she is; she ate nuts out in the carriage, and cracked them with her own teeth, she did.«

And now we have passed through the lodge gates, and are rolling along between the avenue of tall trees that mark the approach to Flytton. It is a beautiful old place, and a footman ushers me through stately passages and ante-rooms to the drawing-room, in which I have some difficulty in discovering Lady Flytton—so little, so wizen, so shrunken is she. I make her out at last in a far corner. I think she is asleep, but she opens her eyes suddenly, and bids me welcome, very kindly desiring the footman to bring white wine and grapes; while I eat the latter, she chatters away, with the garrulity of old age, of mother, who was,

she says, »a beautiful young woman«; of everything, in short, that her wandering thoughts hit upon. Presently she leans back in her chair, and without the smallest sign or word, goes soundly to sleep. I am just wondering what I am going to do with myself, and thinking how lively it will be here, when the glass door leading to the garden swings back, and Silvia Fleming comes into the room, and, without looking about her, sits down with her back to me in a low chair. Her hair is hanging down her back in thick curls; she wears a plain white wrapper, that by its severity makes her beauty more than ever conspicuous. There is a listless droop about the whole figure as she leans back with her arms clasped under her head. She has not been seated there twenty seconds, when the door opens, and »Captain Chichester« is announced; he is tall, languid, *blasé*, but his steps and face quicken as he spies the recumbent figure in the red velvet chair.

»How do you do?« he says, stooping over her and holding out his hand; but she does not put out hers; she only looks up at him with a lazy look of welcome, provocation, which is it?

»Too hot!« she says; »would not one think it August instead of September?«

He sits down beside her, and they talk in low voices. They do not seem to know any one is present; however, as I cannot hear what they are saying, it is somewhat unnecessary for me to announce myself, though indeed I am not anxious to play the degrading part of *eaves-dropper* again, as I did a week ago.

Is yonder coquette the passionate, despairing woman that Paul Vasher kissed a while ago so hotly? Was it but a fine piece of acting—her love and her misery? For surely, surely she is acting her own proper character at this moment? No, she was not acting then, but she was taken out of herself for the time; and Paul's estimate of her is the right one, the taint of infidelity in her nature is too deep to permit her to be either a good or a faithful woman. Admiration is meat and drink to her, flattery the very air she breathes; no man could keep this woman straight any more than a rope can be made of sand. She does not love this man to whom she is talking, does not even admire him, but she will fool him to the top of his bent. A woman's vanity takes many lives to feed it. So much I guess randomly as I sit and watch her.

»*Little devil!*« says Lady Flytton, softly. Turn-

ing to look at the old woman, I find that she has come out of her sleep as suddenly as she entered it, and is surveying the couple yonder with an expression of countenance, that is, to say the least of it, vicious.

»Good afternoon, Captain Chichester!« she remarks austerely.

The young man looks round with an astonishment that is ludicrous, rises and comes toward the old lady. Silvia, I observe, does not move an inch.

»I did not know any one was here,« he says, holding out a hand that Lady Flytton altogether overlooks.

»I dare say you did not,« she says, frostily; and he goes back to his charmer, looking somewhat red and decidedly snubbed. Tea is brought in, and we partake of it apart. Oh, it is dull! If the little woman does not like her company, why does she not leave it? Anon Captain Chichester takes his departure, and it being near the dinner hour, I am shown to my room, where I array myself in my little all, and modestly habited in the same, descend to the drawing-room. Silvia Fleming is there, and she speaks some half-words of greeting, giving me the contemptuous, indifferent

regard that apparently she always bestows on her own sex. Mrs. Fleming comes in, fat and kind; I like her better than her daughter; last of all Lady Flytton; and we go in to dinner, where there is next to no conversation, for the hostess devotes herself to her knife and fork with the assiduity of a woman who knows her time for wielding the same is short, and the other two have little conversation. In the drawing-room later the two elders sit together, knitting and talking, while Silvia's restless figure paces up and down, up and down, the terraced walk outside, and I sit at a table, turning over a photograph book, and pitying myself from the very bottom of my soul.

»It is too ridiculous,« says Mrs. Fleming's vexed voice, rising in her excitement, »and the offers and admiration she has had too!«

»She is a bad little cat,« says Lady Flytton, shaking her ungodly, Madeira-warmed old head, »and she'll never come to any good, never! As to Paul Vasher, he'll never marry her; he knows her too well for that!«

I move quickly away before I hear more, and marvel for the ninety-ninth time why I was ever invited to Flytton.

CHAPTER XIX.

»Give me that man,
That is not passions' slave, and I will wear him
In my heart's core; ay, in my heart of hearts.«

A TAP at the door. »Come in,« I say, pausing in my wrestle with my bonnet strings—which I am trying to settle in a bow that will not disgrace Lady Flytton's smart chariot—and enter Silvia. Apparently she is not going to church, for although we start in five minutes' time, she wears a white morning gown and slippers.

»Will you do something for me?« she asks, sitting down.

»Tell me what it is first,« I say, cautiously.

»You know Mr. Vasher?«

»Yes!«

»Will you give him this note after church?«

I look at the held-out *billet*, and for a moment hesitate. I love to help lovers; but I like him, and I do not like her; shall I hurt him by taking it? He is strong enough to take care of himself.

»Yes, I will give it him,« I say, and put it in my pocket.

»You are a good child,« she says, and goes away.

I wonder if he will be in church? Yes, he is there, as I discover twenty minutes later, and he gives me a friendly look as I go up the aisle behind Mrs. Fleming. That old heathen Lady Flytton never goes to church. The Buffs give me a smile or two, and I wink affectionately at Mary Burns at a favourable opportunity. In the porch outside, when the service is over, I find Mr. Vasher, which is lucky; for supposing I had been obliged to run after him?

»When are you coming back, little one?« he asks.

»Soon! To-morrow some time!« I say, flounderingly, then I thrust the note into his hand and flee.

»Did you give it him?« asks Silvia, as we are walking in the garden after luncheon.

»Yes.«

»How hot it is!« she says, shrugging her shoulders, »there is a storm brewing!«

She speaks truth, the morning was sultry, the afternoon is worse, the air is charged and heavy

with heat, the skies are closing in black as night, the very birds have ceased singing; all creation seems to be holding its breath, awaiting one of nature's fierce convulsions. With the same instinct that has sent all the animals to their hiding-places, I go in, leaving Silvia pacing up and down, with clasped hands, and an intent look of listening upon her face. I am not ashamed to confess it, I am horribly, terribly afraid of a thunderstorm; the dread crack of the awful, invisible hosts above always make me shiver, and through my eyelids the lightning seems to strike and blind me. After all I must be a coward, for Jack does not mind it at all; he opens his eyes wide, and never puts his fingers in his ears. The sisters are fast asleep in a remote corner of the queer shaped, many-angled room; every now and then a gentle snore attests to their happy unconsciousness. When I am old, I dare say I shall consider it a godly and suitable employment to spend my sabbath afternoons in slumber; being young and broadly awake, I find the time hangs very heavily on my hands. I take a peep at »Good Words«; I look at the pictures in the »Sunday at Home«, finally I take up Lady Flytton's album, which I have indeed already explored, but still find interesting, thanks to the

extraordinary unhandsomeness of her friends and relations; her defunct husband bearing the palm away from them all for general unsavouriness, imbecility, and grimace. I am just grinning at the photograph of a very short man, who has a most ferocious expression of countenance, and looks as though he were saying, »Laugh at me if you dare!« when the door opens, and Paul Vasher is announced. The sisters do not awake, and he does not see me. In another moment he is face to face with Silvia, who comes hastily through the glass door.

»You sent for me,« he says, »and I have come.«

»Come out into the garden,« she says abruptly.

And they go out together, along the terrace, and disappear among the trees. An hour slips away, the light fails strangely; the skies are of ink, save where a lurid-tipped cloud betokens mischief; every leaf and tree and flower stands stirless; there is not a living thing to be seen.

Steps come quickly along the terrace, and Paul Vasher comes in alone. I am half leaping up to speak to him, when something in his face checks me, and I fall back; in another moment

he is gone. The closing door awakens Lady Flytton, who sits up, and asks sharply—

»Who was that just went out?«

»Mr. Vasher.«

»Vasher here!« screams the old woman. »Has that little cat been up to some more of her tricks? Well, he didn't stay long!« And she composes herself to sleep again.

»Was I snoring, child?« asks Mrs. Fleming, with some anxiety.

»Not much!«

Hark! A few drops of rain, heavy as lead, fall with a hissing sound upon the pavement; a low faint moan comes sweeping up over the land, and now, with an awful, shivering reverberation, the heavens are rent in twain, the forked lightning leaps out, the floodgates of heaven are loosed, and the storm is upon us. I bury my head in my hands to shut out the glare of the lightning, but through the hideous discord, I hear Mrs. Fleming's voice ask, in sharp fear, »Where is Silvia?«

Out yonder; out in the fury and teeth of the storm, as reckless, as wild, as the hurricane itself; and God only knows what depths of misery and shame she is sounding. Paul Vasher's face was

not hard to read. And child as I am, I know that she has played her last stake, *and lost*.

In her present mood she will court death, if I know anything of her character. Some one must find her, and bring her back. But who? I will. My life out there is as much in God's hand as here; and though I do not love her, I would do this much for my worst enemy. I take my hands from my eyes, snatch up a shawl lying near, and, heedless of Mrs. Fleming's exclamations of horror, step out on to the terrace. Down comes the waterspout in its resistless strength, almost beating me to earth; blinded with lightning, deafened with thunder, bewildered by the hurly-burly, I push on, looking hither and thither, in every nook and corner, but I cannot find her. Stronger and fiercer grows the storm. At my side a tree smitten in mid-air by an unseen hand, is whirled aloft, and hurled crashing to the ground; a rabbit struck dead by lightning lies in my path; overhead, from end to end of heaven, echoes that long, hollow, shuddering peal that always sounds to me like the shrieks and wild laughter of lost souls in Hades. At last I come upon her, sitting under a tree, in a far-off corner, looking out at the storm as indifferently as though

it were a pageant arranged for her especial amusement.

»Silvia!« I cry while yet I am a little way off,
»Silvia!« But she never stirs, never lifts her head, or unclasps her hands, or seems to know my voice, while all about her lie the wrack and ruin of the wild hurricane; and a few yards away, an oak struck with lightning stands bare and ghastly, stripped of its bark. I am stepping towards her, when—oh, my God!—the heavens above us open; a great light shines upon our faces, and, cleaving the air, there rushes towards us a great crimson ball of flame. I shut my eyes, and stand motionless: is not this death? and with a hiss and a swirl, and a burning breath that scorches my face, it smites the ground at my feet, and a great smoke belches forth, and hides everything from my eyes. Dimly I grope my way round to the other side; I am not killed, therefore Silvia must be——But there she sits looking just as she looked before the bolt fell.

»Alive and unharmed, thank God!« I cry, taking her cold hand in mine.

»If it had only killed me,« she says, in a whisper, pointing her finger at the sullen flames; »if I had been only one step nearer——«

»Come away!« I say gently, and she does not resist, but lets me lead her away like a child. Her face is pale as the dead; her lovely eyes look straight before her, as though they beheld only one object; her hair hangs dank and heavy down her dripping back. An uncommonly nice couple we look as we reach the house, with pools of water running from our clothes; as beaten down and draggled as yonder poor flowers that lie with broken stalks in their churned-up beds.

Mrs. Fleming shrieks at her daughter's face—and, indeed, she might well have taken some grievous hurt out in the storm, to judge by her looks—but the girl pulls herself wearily away.

»Leave me alone,« she says, and goes slowly up the stairs, to the great embellishment of her aunt's carpeting, and I follow. On the landing she turns round.

»Come into my room, by-and-by,« she says.

I have slipped out of my wet clothes, and am almost attired in dry ones, when Mrs. Fleming comes in, bearing a tumbler of hot wine, which she makes me drink. It tastes very good, but surely it is rather strong?

She goes away, and I proceed with my toilet; but somehow, I don't seem to be quite mistress

of my legs, and in crossing the room I have to tack a good deal. My ideas, too, are very hazy. I find myself surveying various articles of my attire with a benignant and fixed smile, instead of putting them on; and I am, by-and-by, distinctly conscious that, with no apparent volition of my own, I am standing before my looking-glass, swaying from side to side, and saying, in an indistinct voice, »My intentions is good, Jack, but my legs is weak.« And after that I know nothing, save that I am blessedly, soundly asleep.

The clock is striking seven as I awake, and Mrs. Fleming is looking down on me with some anxiety.

»What does it all mean?« I say, rubbing my eyes; »I never went to sleep like this in the daytime before. Was it the thunderbolt?«

»No,« says Mrs. Fleming, »I think it was the wine. I put brandy in it to keep the cold out, and forgot you were not used to it.«

»And so I have been tipsy,« I say, putting my hand to my head; »oh, what *would* papa say if he could see me?«

»Say it was my fault,« says Mrs. Fleming, »and now, my dear, don't trouble about that; can

you go to Silvia now? She has been asking for you.«

»I will be ready in a minute; but, Mrs. Fleming, you will never tell any one about it, *will* you?«

»Never,« she says, smiling, and goes away.

To my knock at Silvia's door, I receive no answer; pushing it open, I enter. She is standing by a window, looking at the smoke that rises from the spot where the bolt lies embedded. She is talking to herself, and does not seem to see or hear me, although I am before her eyes.

»I was wrong to wish it had killed me,« she mutters; »after all it's a stupid thing to do—to die. Talk of the proud contempt of spirits risen, it is the living, who have the best of it, and despise the dead. If I had died to-day, the women who hate me, would have said, 'Poor creature!' *he* would have said, 'Poor Silvia.' I should have been *poor Silvia*, a weak loving fool to all eternity to him. I will live!—live to punish the scorn and coldness that has dared repay such love as mine—live to make him rue the day he made Silvia Fleming stoop to pray in vain. When he least expects me, I will be there; in the hour of his joy, I will stand by his side and strike the cup

from his lips; in his night of sorrow, I will rejoice over him—and since I cannot have his love, I will work his misery—and this I will do, *so help me God!*«

The last lurid gleam of the storm is on her set face, and in her wide eyes. Has the afternoon actually crazed her brain?

»Are you there, child?« she says, turning round sharply. »Have you heard all the nonsense I have been talking?«

»Some of it.«

»Bah!« she says; »I have a bad habit of talking aloud. You were a good little thing to come out and find me like that; it would not have been pleasant to be killed by that bolt, eh?«

»No,« I say, shuddering, »but it was very near, a narrow escape. Have you told Mrs. Fleming?«

»Not I! How that old woman, my aunt, would have hopped, if she had seen it all! That red thing coming through the air, you and I with our mouths wide open, at least yours was——« She goes off into a fit of laughter, that does not strike me as being particularly seemly.

»You can go now,« she says; »will you send my mother up to me?«

Truly Silvia Fleming has somewhat odd man-

ners. Down in the drawing-room I find the sisters looking out of a window at the desolation of the garden, and having delivered my message to Mrs. Fleming, proceed to inform Lady Flytton of the shave we had, to which she listens with many upliftings of her hands and exclamations.

»And all that little cat's fault,« she says. »Whatever will your mother say, when she hears that I took so little care of you? As to that Silvia, it's my belief she is being saved up for something worse!«

CHAPTER XX.

»A heat full of coldness; a sweet full of bitters; a pain full of pleasantness which maketh thoughts have eyes and hearts and ears; bred by desire, nursed by delight, weaned by jealousy, killed by dissembling, turned by ingratitude— and this is love.«

»I WONDER if Paul will come to-night,« says Mr. Frere, stirring the fire with a recklessness highly reprehensible in a godly man during these days of greedy coal-merchants and champagne-drinking colliers.

It is rainy October now, and the nights are cold and frosty, and without, mother earth is drawing the flowers, her darlings, down into her brown breast, as Hans Andersen tells us, away from the Frost-King's breath, which strikes chilly against the tender green stalks and late-tarrying fuchsias, myrtles, and magnolias.

»I don't think he is coming back at all!« I say, nodding; »he has been gone such a long, long time, you know—weeks!«

»Paul always keeps his word,« says Mr. Frere. »He is sure to come back. Besides, he left all

his things here.« That is conclusive, for however heart-broken a man may be, he does not usually forget his dressing-case and his little comforts.

»The ground is good for walking just now,« says Mr. Frere. »I dare say he has got as far as Devonshire.«

Yes, the ground is good for walking, but I think all roads are pretty much alike to him just now. As I sit staring into the fire, I seem to see Mr. Vasher walking swift and fast, trying to escape from his restless thoughts; trying to quench a flame that will not be put out. Pshaw! Probably I see a myth and a fallacy, and at this very moment he is dancing a jig or——

»Are you asleep?« asks a cheerful voice behind me.

»You have come back!« I cry, starting up; »how glad I am. We were beginning to think you were lost!«

As the firelight falls on his face I see that it is pale and worn as that of a man who has fought a battle against fierce odds, and though wounded and hard pressed in the conflict—*won*.

»Where is my uncle?« he says, looking round.

»He was here a minute ago, but Mrs. Pim

fetches him to go to Sally Lane, who says she is dying.«

»I wonder how long she will be about it?«

»She has been dying for twenty years,« I say, laughing, »and she will probably be dying for twenty more! Dying with her means *port*.«

»Does my uncle give her a bottle to soothe her last moments?«

»Always! About once a month, you know; and she is far too careful a body to go off until she has drunk the last drop; then the thought of the next bottle supports her.«

Mr. Vasher laughs. »Do you know,« he says, »that I have missed you, child, during these past weeks? Over and over again I have wished I had your saucy chatter to listen to. What have you been doing with yourself—anything particular?«

»Something very particular,« I say solemnly, or at least—almost. It is a miracle you do not find Miss Fleming's pieces and mine laid out in baskets.«

»What do you mean,« he asks sharply. »You have been in danger—and Silvia?«

»It was a thunderbolt,« I explain; »she and I were only a few yards apart, and it fell between us.«

»And you were out in the storm that day, you two?«

»I went to look for Silvia, she was out in it.«

»Did she not come in after I left?«

»No!«

»Good heavens,« he cries, striking his head with his clenched fist. »What a brute I was! Where is she now?«

»At Homburg.«

»I wonder what she is doing!« he says half to himself.

»Flirting!« I answer, almost before I know what I am saying; I have an unhappy knack of blurt-ing out the thought that is uppermost in my mind.

»What makes you think so, child?« he asks, turning quickly to me.

»I did not mean to say that, Mr. Vasher. I was only thinking.«

»And your opinion of her?« he says, looking at me. »I always like to have a very young person's opinion about another—it is always true; what is it?«

»She is young,« I say thoughtfully, »and well-born and rich and beautiful, and—I am sorry for her.«

»Sorry!« he says, looking at me keenly, »and why are you sorry? What more does she want?«

»She is not happy,« I say, turning my head away, that he may not see how red my face is. If he only knew that I know the whole story, that I have been an eaves-dropper!

»You have not told me what you think of her,« he says; »I want an answer.«

»I am not fond of her,« I say slowly. »I would not trust her; she is rather cruel, but she could love well——«

»And never be faithful,« says Paul. »Well! you will be a woman some day, little one; shall I give you some advice? But no, you would not take it; you will fall in love like the rest, some day!«

»And why should I not?« I ask; »everybody does!«

»Love,« he says, »is made up of vanity and vexation, folly and bitterness; it turns to dust between the teeth.«

»Your creed is a hard one,« I say. »Now, I have seen some lovers (I think of Alice and Charles), who never have any of that; they are fair in each other's eyes, and though they squabble sometimes, they never think of using any of those

long words you do; they positively would not understand them.«

»Perhaps they are worthy of each other,« he says. »When two people trust one another, then their love is a pleasant thing, a jewel. But if a man loves a woman, and she proves unworthy, and he loves her still, cannot you guess something of the battle that is fought in that man's soul—the higher nature crying, Desist! the lower, Yield! The indomitable will and self-respect of the man fighting against the quenchless passionate longing after the beauty of the woman he renounces . . . the integrity of the mind warring against the heart that rises in fierce revolt against such sacrifices . . . the lily of renunciation against the crimson blossom of love . . . and the crowning sin and shame if it all must be that, while he knows her worthlessness, he cannot forget her—her sweet words and ways . . . her veil of rippling hair, her clinging lips . . . in these memories must lie that man's chief tortures. . . .«

He passes his hand impatiently over his forehead and starts up. »Forgive me child,« he says, »I have been thinking aloud. Does my psychological study interest you? Poor devil, I hope he may reach the shore, don't you? A past error

thoroughly repented of, is the best basis for future good conduct! Can I take any message to Silver-bridge for you to-morrow, little one?»

»You are going there?» I say, clasping my hands. »Oh! can you not put me in your pocket? Shall you stay long?»

»Only a couple of days. I am going abroad afterwards; and when I come back you will be a grown-up young lady?»

»Worse luck!» I say dolefully. »I should like to put off 'tails' for another ten years!»

»Tell me,« he says, leaning forward and taking my face in his hands, »how old are you?»

»Fourteen!»

»So much? you look about twelve; you have a dear little face, and a sweet——But I won't say I hope you will be pretty when I come back! If ever you pray heartily for anything, child, pray that you may never grow up beautiful.»

»There is not much fear!» I say ruefully. »I don't think any amount of praying would mend matters!»

»If you are good,« he says, »that is all you want, and I think you will be.»

»People like one so much better when one is pretty than when one is plain,« I say meditatively.

»Plain people get all the leavings. Might not one be good and pretty too?«

»They might, but they very seldom are! No; when I come back, child, I hope I shall find you just as you are now.«

»May I not grow, sir?«

»Grow as much as you please, child; but don't grow out of honesty!«

CHAPTER XXI.

»At Christmas I no more desire a rose
Than wish a snow in May's new fangled shows,
But like of each thing that in season grows.«

CHRISTMAS has come with his garment of snow and crown of holly and icicles, with his jolly red face and lavishly-filled hands, and he has abode with us a little space, wielding his sceptre royally at feast and wassail; but now that the poor old year, the friend out of which he grew, is dying, and the new one in all its pride and pomp is dawning, he sweeps away from us sorrowfully, and we see his face no more. Jack and I, home for the holidays, have been very literally obeying the golden mandate that bids mankind »Gather ye roses while ye may«, and we have eaten plum-pudding and Christmas cates galore, reaping the punishment of our unholy gluttony in aches and pains that we have had to take upon our backs and bear in silence, venturing on no complaint; for in the somewhat unique rules of our family there is a stringent one: »Thou shalt not be sick.«

Ill or well, faint, pain-stricken our bilious, in our places at table we must appear; and if unkind nature, refusing to be tutored, makes our faces pale and anxious, by angry looks and words are we made to feel the shamelessness and iniquity of our conduct. If either of us have a bout of real illness that refuses to be knocked on the head in deference to the governor's will, the culprit is placed under the ban of an awful and crushing displeasure below stairs; that person's name is never mentioned, and when the convalescent makes his appearance in public, white and attenuated, his presence is ignored; he is considered to have disgraced himself past all forgiveness. To call in Esculapius is a dangerous and most ticklish proceeding, and only ventured on in a case of extreme emergency; he knows his peril, and comes with reluctance and departs with alacrity. All things considered, we have had rather a stormy time of it lately. Over and above the perpetual little disasters that will occur in so tightly managed a household (for every one knows that human nature, if squeezed in at one place, will burst out in another), the long expected difficulty about Alice's and Charles's matrimonial affairs has appeared upon the scene. The six months of probation having expired,

Captain Lovelace has pressed for a formal engagement, and hinted at a wedding day, only to be met with contumely, and dismissed with insult and mockery. He does not come here now—his place knows him no more, and the rebellious look on my sister's lovely face brings her many a bitter word and hard sneer; but outwardly, at least, she acquiesces in her lot, and says no word on the subject, good, bad, or indifferent. She is growing very thin, our pretty Alice. It might move any man's heart to see how her face pales day by day, how slender her little wrists and waist are. But papa never heeds, never looks; he lays hard burdens upon his children, and does not touch them with so much as the tip of his finger. I think we would deal him out greater mercy than he deals us.

Although I was so faithful a gooseberry to Alice, she never speaks of Charles Lovelace to me. Often I come upon her and Milly in close confabulation, and feel unreasonably vexed; for, after all, is not Milly sixteen, and old enough to understand, while I am but fourteen, and supposed to know nothing whatever on the subject of love and courtship? Ah! they don't know I have got a sweetheart too! That is a secret. I am a good deal puzzled by Miss Alice; I thought her so

plucky, and good for any amount of fighting. Can she be going to »lay her down and die« without a protest? On this point I am speedily disabused, making, in fact, a discovery so astounding and petrifying, that for a while I feel as though some one had rapped me on the head smartly and then run away, leaving me to recover as best I might.

It is on this wise. Diving under Alice and Milly's bed one day, after a slippery vagrant orange, I discover the ample space beneath the huge old four-poster to be filled with packed and corded trunks—Alice's all, from the imperial down to the bonnet-box.

Is she going away? She has nowhere to go to. An awful thought strikes me, and I sit down on the floor, valance in hand, to follow it up. Can she be going to *run away*? She has no money. Ah! but Charles Lovelace has, and I read of a couple the other day who, after wasting away apart for six months, ran away and got married, and became fat directly. But then their governors weren't a patch upon ours! Alice never can be meditating anything so desperate as *that*.

As I sit ruminating, she herself comes in and sits down opposite me—a charming figure in her

winter gown of dark blue, with the snowy Quakerish kerchief and apron of muslin.

»Alice,« I say, lifting the valance and pointing at the assemblage of boxes, »are you *going away*?«

She looks at me considering.

»I did not want you to know, Nell,« she says, »but as you have found it out it can't be helped. I am going to be married.«

»Married!« I repeat. »Oh, Alice!«

She looks such a child, as she sits yonder, to wear a wedding ring on her finger, and be called Mrs., and order the dinner.

»It is all his fault,« she says, nodding towards a distant field where we can see the governor harrying his work-people; »there is nothing else to be done!«

There is a clouded, sorrowful look in her blue eyes; lovely bits of colour that *savants* say are becoming year by year more rare, the dark brown and slate slowly, but surely, hustling the saucy azure off the human countenance.

»Charles says it would have gone on like this for ever, and that we may as well get it over now as in a year's time. If I stayed here much longer, Nell, I should *die*!«

»Dear love!« I say, jumping up and running

to her. »Well, it will be wretched without you, disgusting« (the tears trickle down my cheeks); »but I am not sorry, for you will be happy, dear! But, Alice, Alice, *papa!*«

»His capers, you mean?«

»He will kill us!« I say, with conviction. »Do not ever expect to receive any account of what happens after you leave, for there will not be one man left to tell the tale! You may look in the *Times* for the following announcement: 'At Silverbridge, the wife and eleven children of Colonel Adair, the sad result of domestic circumstances over which he had no control.'«

»Indeed, I do think of you all very much,« says Alice; »it makes me very miserable.«

»Don't fret, dear; we have weathered storms enough, and why not that? When are you going?«

»To-morrow!«

»Oh, Alice! And you are going to Mr. Skipworth's to-night?«

»Yes; that was why we fixed to-morrow. Charles's man is going to get all the boxes out of the house, and Tabitha is going to help him.«

»And would you have gone without telling me?« I ask, putting my arms round her neck, and

raining down a steady drip of tears on to her pretty head.

»I should have wished you good-bye, dear, but I did not mean to tell you, for fear he should ask you all round afterwards if you knew anything.«

»Milly knows?«

»Yes.«

»And mother?«

»Good heavens, *no!* How shall I ever say good-bye to her? She will see you have been crying, Nell.«

»Do you think you will ever come back?« I ask piteously. »Do you think you will go away for ever?«

»No, no,« she says; »we will come and see you at school, Charles and I, next half, and we shall stay somewhere near here, so as to see mother. Besides, sooner or later, it will be made up.«

»Never!« I say, shaking my miserable head; »he will never forgive you for getting out of his clutches.«

»Alice!« calls mother in the distance, and with a warm hug and kiss she goes away.

»You *do* look a beauty!« says Jack, meeting me half an hour later. »Have you torn your last remaining frock to ribbons?«

»Preserved gooseberries,« I say, determined to put as bold a face upon matters as I can; »they were very sour, you know, and they made my stomach ache, and I howled.«

»Well, I never knew you cry about such a trifle as *that* before,« he says loftily.

I should like to tell him, but I must not. Eight o'clock has struck. The governor and mother, Alice and Milly, set out for the parsonage an hour ago; scarcely within our memory has he been known to spend an evening out, but to-night he has really gone. It is to be hoped Charles's man and Tabitha will do their spiriting gently, and not be caught. I wonder if Charles Lovelace is wandering about among the flower-beds keeping watch? We have supper, Amberley, Jack, Dolly, Alan, and I. I am just thinking of retiring to my couch, there to indulge in a good comfortable roar, when Dolly appears bearing a small and elaborately folded note, which she hands to me: »*I challenge you to a bolstering match.*—JACK«. Now, if there is one thing on earth I love more than another, it is a hearty, no-quarter-given bolstering match round the house with Jack, and it is a treat I very seldom get, thanks to the governor's barnacle-like habit of sticking at home. To-night is a splendid

opportunity, we are never likely to get such another; but with to-morrow's event impending over me, and with my heavy heart holding me down, I doubt if I should be able to give Jack those vigorous whacks to which he is accustomed, so I take a sheet of paper, write on it, »*Can't. I'm ill.*—NELL«, and fold it as elaborately as his. Dolly goes away with it, but quickly returns with another. »*You are afraid, you ate enough supper for six.*—JACK«; to which I make answer, »*I ain't! I didn't! Come on*«, and then prepare for the conflict. I take off my dress and upper petticoats and shoes, put on my nightgown, tuck the sleeves well up over my arms; then, selecting my stoutest and strongest pillow, I sling it over my back and sally forth. The dimly lit passage is empty, but I creep warily along, keeping a keen eye to right and left, for behind yonder chest the foe may lurk, or from out yonder half-shut door he may suddenly spring; and if I am not prepared with my weapon, whack! upon my defenceless head will come a blow, heavy in proportion to the skill of the hand that aims it. Gingerly then I go, breathless with expectation, every nerve strung to its highest pitch; but the foe does not appear, and I am just wondering whether he is

lazy or meditating a dishonourable attack from the rear, when, whirr! from the oriel window comes a swift, well-directed blow that would smite me to earth did I not catch it midway with my pillow, which meets the other in a sounding crack that reverberates through the house. Now the engagement is opened, the exchange of compliments is brisk, and ducking, dodging, slashing, backing, retreating, advancing, we have a hand-to-hand encounter, until Amberley appears at the top of the stairs, candlestick in hand, meek, scandalized, open-mouthed. Down the corridor I flee, Jack in hot pursuit, showering liberal blows on my vanishing tail; past Amberley, who, being in the line of battle, receives a blow intended for my worthless back, which smites the candlestick from her hand and flattens her, a heap of ruins, against the wall; down the stairs like a flash of lightning; through the nurseries like a clap of thunder, where the nurse cries »Shame!« and the youngsters, »Go it!« out on the other side, down the lower staircase, across the hall into the dining-room. . . . but where is Jack? He was at my heels a moment ago; now he is neither to be heard nor seen. . . . Is he listening at the door, or creeping up behind me? The room is in total darkness, save for a

tiny stream that shows under the half-opened door from the hall lamp. I wonder what all that commotion in the hall is about? Can Jack have run against Simpkins in his pursuit, and upset the old thing? He is sure to be here in a minute. . . . I mount a chair behind the door. . . . As he comes in I will deal him a blow that will make him wink. Footsteps are approaching; he is coming. . . . I grasp my bolster convulsively, the door opens, and, bang! with all the strength of my body and soul, I bring it down on the head of—Jack? Scarcely. Does Jack swear like a trooper, and dance like a dervish? Does Jack rush madly hither and thither, vowing when he catches me to »break every bone in my skin?« My heart sinks like lead, the bolster drops from my limp fingers, my feet are glued to the chair, as the awful conviction strikes me that I have been bolstering *the governor*. Some instinct of self-preservation, as he comes near me in his furious search, makes me leave my perch and dodge him swiftly and noiselessly round and round. Finally, watching my opportunity, I bolt out of the door just as William appears with candles, shoot past him like a meteor, and am up the stairs before you could say »Jack Robinson«. Papa, dashing out in hot pursuit, butts

head foremost into the outstretched arms of the footman, and they roll over and over and over, master, man, candles and all. A confused sound as of Wombwell's menagerie ascends to my ears, as I fly past the maids and fry who are hanging over the stairs anxiously watching the march of events, and having locked myself into my chamber, I sit down on the side of my bed with my eyes fixed upon the door, expecting it every moment to fly asunder and admit my executioner. But though I hear terrible sounds of devastation and fury in the distance, the minutes pass, and still he comes not. After a while, therefore, I am able to draw a deep breath, and contemplate the fact of my being still alive without any particular amazement.

By-and-by a gentle knock comes at the door. »Who is it?« I ask, trembling. Perhaps it is only a trick of my outraged parent?

»Me,« says Jack's voice. Why will people persist in believing that »Me« is known of everybody and requires no bush? I open the door and let him in, lock it again, then turn round and face him.

»*You sneak!*« I say slowly; »you took good care to hide yourself, didn't you? And you took

good care not to warn me, didn't you? *I'm ashamed of you!* «

»That's just like a girl,« says Jack, sitting down. »Stow your heroics a bit, and listen to me. I followed you as far as the hall, and half-way across I caught my foot in a beast of a mat, and went head foremost. When I picked myself up you had vanished, and I was just wondering whether you had gone into the library or the dining-room, when a ring came at the front door-bell; and I had hardly got behind Venus, when in walked the governor! Quarrelled with Skippy, I suppose, or yearned for his family; at any rate *there he was*. He went into the dining-room, and the next thing I heard was a fearful *whack!* then noise enough to lift the hair from one's head. Then out you rushed, the governor at your heels, and bang he went into William's arms, and over they went. Oh! shall I ever forget it!« He stuffs a corner of the sheet into his mouth and rolls. »The candles were squashed as flat as pancakes, and the governor, only too glad to vent his rage on somebody, pommelled William like mad, who was underneath and offered no resistance, merely saying, 'Don't, sir! don't, sir! don't, sir!' without stopping for a single moment. I was behind Venus

all the time, and I shook so, that I nearly knocked the poor soul over. By the time the governor had finished off William, Amberley appeared, bleating. The governor soon squashed her into a jelly; and after shaking his fist at your door, and muttering darkly about to-morrow, he stormed himself into the library.«

»Jack,« I say, in a voice that I try hard to make »don't-carish«, »do you—do you think he will *kill* me?«

»No,« says Jack, judicially, »because he knows he would be hung if he did; but if he was sure he wouldn't be, he'd do it like a shot! It's going rather far with him, you know, to bolster him!«

I shudder. Has this wretched hand of mine really dealt him a smashing blow on the head? Perhaps it will wither up.

»What a mercy it is there is a gallows in this country!« I say, with a sigh. »It is such a protection!«

»'Hard words break no bones,' says Jack cheerfully, »and he won't whip you, you're too big! Don't bother, Nell,« he says, putting his arm round my shoulders; »you shall come and live with me some day, and we'll be as jolly as sand-boys.«

»Dear old fellow!« I say, rubbing my miserable face against his cool red and white one. »You'll sit next to me at breakfast to-morrow, *won't* you?«

»All right,« he says, and presently gives me a hug and goes away.

Oh, if only to-morrow would never come! If I might go to sleep now, this minute, and not wake up again for five years! Papa would surely have forgotten then? If time would only step over breakfast, even, I should be safe; for by dinner-time Alice's elopement will be known, and the one overpowering fact will have cast all other misdemeanours into the shade. But, despite prayer and longing, the cold grey dawn comes at last. Groaning I rise and attire myself for the slaughter. As in a dream, I go downstairs and listen to prayers, and then—I will not write down the details of that breakfast. I must be a hardened sinner, indeed, for when it is over my spirit is not broken, nor my hair grey. I am even able to reflect with complacency on the fact that I still possess my full complement of arms, legs, teeth, etc.; for at one time I trembled for each and all of these valuables. And now I am watching Alice put on her cloak and hat. She is very pale, very

trembling, but she does not cry; and when she is dressed, she goes into mother's room and kisses her, saying she is going to church.

Ay! she is going »to church«, from whence she will come out Alice Lovelace, not Alice Adair—never our own pretty Alice any more. As this thought strikes me, I give a loud sob outside the door, which makes her turn apprehensively; so I cram my handkerchief into my mouth, and choke inwardly. And now we are walking with her across the sodden grass of the dismal, bare garden, towards the postern gate, where Charles Lovelace waits with a travelling carriage and greys.

»Good-bye,« she says, looking into our faces and weeping passionately. Tears do not matter now; there are no more appearances to be kept up.

»Good-bye,« say Milly and I, weeping too, but with a difference. Through her present sorrow the gay, bright future looks; we know what *we* are going back to.

»Good-bye,« says Charles Lovelace, kissing our dripping countenances.

»Good-bye, good-bye!« cries Alice, clinging about our necks in turn.

And now she is in the carriage, the valet jumps

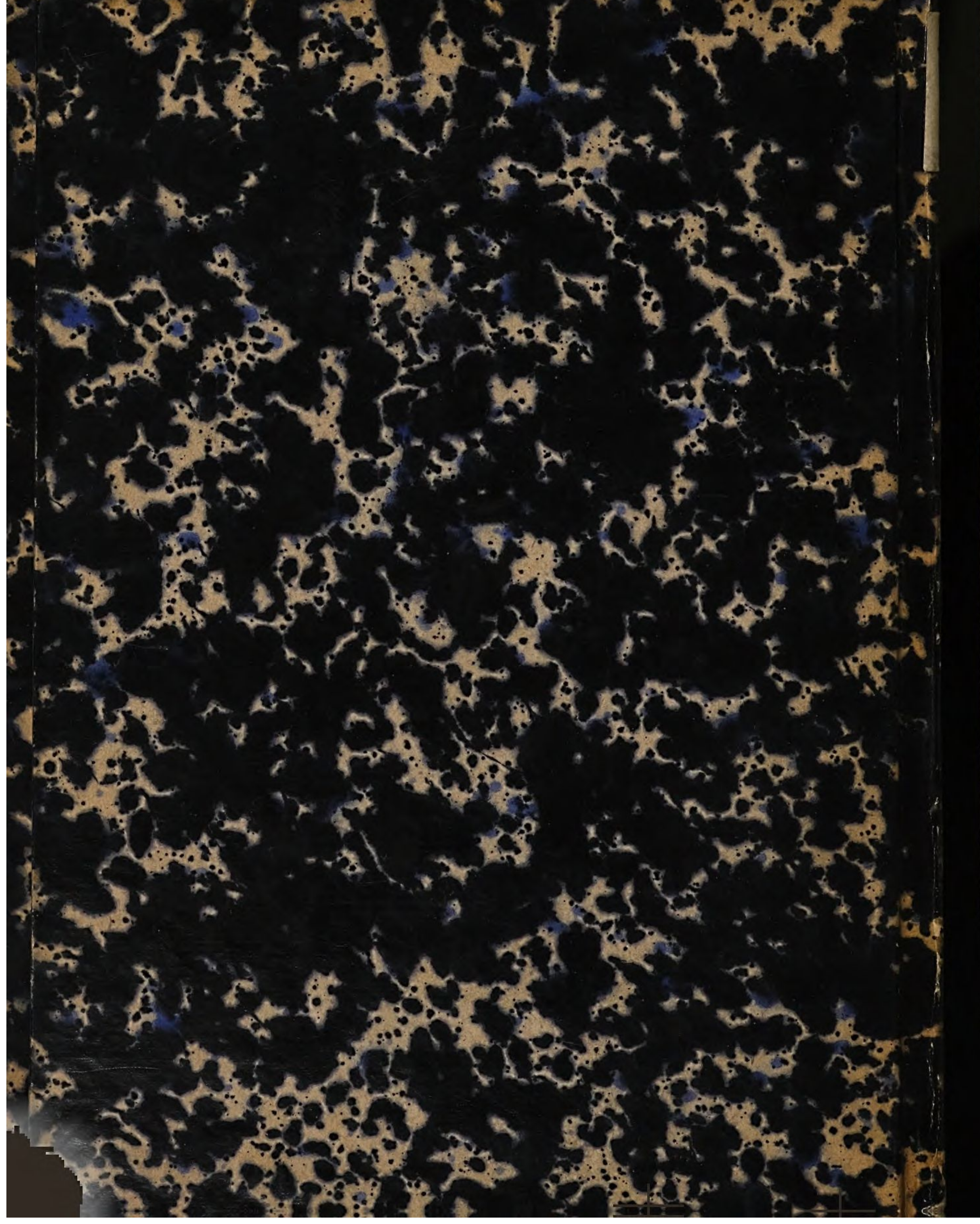
into the rumble, and they are off; Alice's lovely pale face looking out of the window to the very last moment, away, away, through the cold winter morning. A couple of hundred yards away, papa is walking about, happy in the comfortable belief that he holds all our lives in his own hand, and that he can mete us out happiness or misery, according to his sovereign will. Well, one at least of his white slaves has turned a rebel; he will know it by twelve of the clock, and then——

»Dilly, Dilly, Dilly, come and be killed,« I say to Milly as we go heavily back to the house.
»After all, we can only be killed *once!*«

END OF VOL. I.

Stephan Geibel & Co., Printers, Altenbourg.

Longford.



Mathers, Helen B.

Comin' thro' the rye a novel ; in three volumes

Bd.: 1

Hamburg 1878

Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek -- L.angl.o.79(1
urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb11715507-0